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She approached the charger ridden by the bandit chief.
(See page 242.)

The Mission of Janice Day

BY

HELEN BEECHER LONG

AUTHOR OF "JANICE DAY THE YOUNG HOMEMAKER," "THE TESTING OF JANICE DAY," "HOW JANICE DAY WON," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
CORINNE TURNER

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THE MISSION OF JANICE DAY

CHAPTER I

SOMETHING TROUBLES UNCLE JASON

"He don't look right and he don't sleep right," complained Aunt Almira Day, swinging to and fro ponderously in one of the porch rockers and fanning herself vigorously with a folded copy of the *Fireside Favorite*. "If it wasn't for his puttin' away jest as many victuals as usual I'd sartain sure think he was sickenin' for something."

"Oh! I hope Uncle Jason isn't going to be ill," Janice said sympathetically. "He has always seemed so rugged."

"He's rugged enough," Aunt 'Mira continued. "Don't I tell ye he's eatin' full and plenty? But there's something on his mind—an' he won't tell me what 'tis."

"Maybe you imagine it," her niece said, pinning on her hat preparatory to leaving the old Day house on Hillside Avenue, overlooking Polktown.

"Imagine nothin'!" ejaculated Aunt 'Mira with more vigor than elegance. She was not usually snappish in her conversation. She was a fleshy,

lymphatic woman, particularly moist on this unseasonably warm October day, addicted to gay colors in dress and the latest fashions as depicted in the pages of the *Fireside Favorite,* and usually not prone to worries of any kind.

"Imagine nothin'!" she repeated. "I've summered and wintered Jase Day for more'n twenty years; I'd ought to know him and all his ways from A to Izzard. When anything is goin' wrong with him he's allus as close-mouthed as a hard-shell clam with the lockjaw. I vum! I don't know what to make of him now."

"I haven't noticed much out of the way with Uncle Jason," Janice said reflectively. "Aren't you——"

"No, I ain't!" interrupted Aunt 'Mira. "I tell ye he don't sleep right. Lays and grunts and thrashes all night long—mutterin' in his sleep and actin' right foolish. I never see the beat. I must say 't in all the years I've slept beside Jase Day he ain't been like he is now."

"Why don't you ask him what the trouble is?"

"Ask him!" said Aunt 'Mira. "Might as well ask the stone Spink they set up as a god or something down there in Egypt. Ye'd get jest as quick an answer from *it* as ye would from Jase Day when he wants to keep dumb. Dumb! when he wants to say *nothin'* he says it like a whole deef and dumb asylum."

Janice laughed. She had noticed nothing very strange about her uncle's recent manner, and believed Aunt 'Mira, little as she was given to that failing, was borrowing trouble.

The wine of autumn seemed fairly to permeate the air. It was too beautiful a day for youth to be disturbed by mere imaginary troubles. Janice could scarcely keep from singing as she passed down the pleasant thoroughfare. The wide-branching trees shading it showered her with brilliant leaves. Across the placid lake the distant shore was a bank of variegated hues. Even the frowning height on which the pre-revolutionary fortress stood had yielded to the season's magic and looked gay in burning colors of shrub and vine.

Beyond the jaws of the cove upon the shore of which Polktown was builded, a smart little steamboat flaunted a banner of smoke across the sky. The new *Constance Colfax* would soon be at the Polktown dock and Janice was on her way to meet it. That is, this was her obvious purpose, as it was of many Polktown folk abroad at the hour. As yet it was the single daily excitement in which one might indulge in this little Vermont town. Soon the branch of the V. C. Railroad would be opened and then Polktown really would be in frequent touch with the outside world.

Its somnolence, its conservatism, even its crass ignorance of conditions in the great centers of in-

dustry and population, added a charm to life as it was lived in Polktown. Yet it was wide-awake regarding local affairs, and this pretty and well-dressed girl walking so blithely toward High Street had had an actual and important part in the enlivening of the lakeside community during the past few months.

It was Janice Day's earnestness, her "do something" tactics, that had carried to happy conclusion several important public movements in Polktown. Quite unconsciously at first, by precept and example, she had urged awake the long dozing community, and, once having got its eyes open, Janice Day saw to it that the town did not go to sleep again.

She loved Polktown. The Middle-West community where she was born and had lived most of her girlhood was a tender memory to Janice. Her dear mother had died there, and for several years her father and she had lived very close to each other in their mutual sorrow.

In Greenboro, however, she had had little opportunity for that development of character which contact with the world, with strangers and with new conditions, is sure to bring. She had been merely a schoolgirl at home with "daddy" before coming East to live with Uncle Jason and Aunt 'Mira. In Polktown she had found herself.

It may have been thought of this that curved her lips in the contemplative smile they wore, blossomed

the roses in her cheeks, and added the sparkle to her hazel eyes as she tripped along.

To the view of many in Polktown Janice Day was pretty; but in a certain pair of eyes that beheld her to-day while yet she was a great way off, she was the embodiment of everything that was good and beautiful.

Nelson Haley, coming out of the new graded school, of which he was the very capable and unusually beloved principal, owned this particular pair of eyes. He hastened his steps to the corner of the cross street on which the schoolhouse stood and overtook the girl.

"Going right by without noticing me, I presume?" he said, lifting his hat, a frank smile upon his very youthful countenance.

"Of course, Nelson," she said, giving him her hand for a moment and gazing directly into his earnest eyes. That touch and look thrilled them both. Nelson dropped into step with her and they went on down the hill for several moments in a silence which, to these two who knew each other so well, suggested a more certain understanding than speech.

It was Nelson who said as they turned into High Street:

"What meaneth the smile, Janice? What is the immediate thought in that demure head of yours? Something amusing, I'm sure."

Janice laughed outright, flashing him an elfish glance. "I was thinking of something."

"Of course. Out with it," he told her. "Confession is good for the soul and removes the tantalizing element of curiosity."

"Oh, it's not a matter for the confessional. I was just remembering a certain person who arrived in this town not much more than three years ago, and how different she was then—and how different the town!—from the present."

"I acknowledge the immense change which has come over the town; but you, my dear, in your nature and character are as changeless as the hills—even as the Green Mountains of old Vermont."

"Why! I don't know whether that is a compliment or not, Nelson," she cried. "Daddy says the man who doesn't change his politics and his religious outlook in twenty years is dead. They have merely neglected to bury him."

"The fundamentals cannot change," the philosophical young schoolmaster observed. "You have developed, dear girl; but the bud that is blossoming into the flower of your womanhood was curled in the leaf of your character when you first looked at Polktown from the deck of the old *Constance Colfax.*"

"Why, Nelson! that is almost poetical," she said, glancing at him again as they walked side by side toward the dock at the foot of Polktown's principal

business thoroughfare. "And whether it is poetry or not I like it," she added, dimpling again.

"Oh, my *dear!* how different the place looked that day from what it is now. Why, it was only known as *Poketown!* And it was the pokiest, most rubbishy, lackadaisical village I ever saw. Just think of its original name being lost by years of careless pronunciation! The people had even forgotten that sterling old patriot, Hubbard Polk, who first settled here and defied the 'Yorkers.'"

Janice laughed with a reflective note in her voice. "Why, when they cleaned up the town—— Will you *ever* forget Polktown's first Clean-Up Day, Nelson?"

"Never," chuckled the young man. "Such a shaking up of the dry bones, both literal and metaphorical!"

"I can see," said Janice more quietly, "that Polktown has changed and developed whether I have or not. We certainly have learned——"

"To *do something,*" finished Nelson with emphasis. "That's it exactly. The teachings instilled into his daughter's mind by that really wonderful man, Mr. Broxton Day, to the end that she is always eager to begin the battle while other folk are merely talking about it, has served to put Polktown on the map."

Janice squeezed his arm, dimpling and smiling. "Dear daddy!" she mused. "If he only could

get away from business affairs and come out of distracted Mexico to spend his time here in peace and quiet."

"'Peace and quiet!'" repeated the schoolmaster. "Ask Walky Dexter what he thinks of *that.* If your father sustains the reputation his daughter has given him, Polktown would be prodded into an even more strenuous existence than that of our recent successful campaign for no license. Walky believes, Janice, you have all the characteristics of a capsicum plaster."

"Now, Nelson!"

"Fact! You ask him. You're the greatest counter-irritant that was ever applied to any dead-and-alive settlement. . . . 'Lo, Walky!"

The village expressman, as well known as the town pump and quite as important, drew the bony and sleepy Josephus to an abrupt stop beside the smiling pair of young people. Walky's broad, wind-blown countenance was a-grin and his eyes twinkled as he broke into speech:

"Jefers-pelters! d'you know what I caught myself a-doin' when I seen you two folks goin' down hill ahead of me?"

"I couldn't guess, Walky. What?" asked Janice.

"Whistlin' that there 'Bridle March' they play on the church organ when there's a weddin'—haw! haw! haw!"

Janice colored rosily, but could not refrain from laughter at Walky's crude joke. Nobody could be very angry with Walky Dexter, no matter what he said or did.

"That's a poor brand of humor you are peddling, old man," said the schoolmaster coolly. "Besides, you don't pronounce the word right. It's 'bri-*dal*' not 'bridle.' You speak it as though it were a part of Josephus' harness."

"Young man," responded Walky solemnly, but with a twinkle in his watery eye, "when they play that march for you ye'll find ye're harnessed all right. I been merried thutty year now and I oughter know if 'tain't a 'bridle' march and a halter they lead ye to 'stead of a altar."

He exploded another laugh in approval of his own wit and rattled on down to the dock. There was little self-consciousness in the manner of the schoolmaster and Janice. They looked at each other understandingly again and smiled.

Why seek to hide an obvious fact? Every person in Polktown who had arrived at the age of understanding and was not yet senile knew that Nelson Haley and Janice Day had "made a match of it." Only the girl's youth and the necessity for the young man to become established in his calling precluded the thought of matrimony for the present. But they were sure of their feeling for each other. Both had been tested in the months that had passed

since Nelson came to Polktown fresh from his college course and had shown Janice that he could "make good." There had been conflict in both their lives; there had even been clash in their opinions; but the foundation of their affection for each other was too well established for either to doubt.

The simple romance of their lives seemed very sweet indeed to those of their friends whose eyes were not holden. Nelson Haley and Janice Day were at the beginning of that path which, if sometimes rugged and steep to the travelers thereon, is primrose strewn.

They passed one of the largest stores in Polktown—an "emporium" as the gilt sign stated—which had been opened only a few months. Nelson, picking up the first idle topic, said:

"I wonder what's happened to Tom Hotchkiss? I haven't seen him about for some days—and you can't very well miss that important looking red vest he wears."

"Somebody said he'd gone away," Janice replied, as lightly interested in the subject as the schoolmaster. "To buy goods, I presume. He often makes trips to the city for that purpose."

"Hey, you folks! What're you pokin' along so for?" a shrill voice demanded behind them. "She's comin' into the dock now."

A boy clattered by them, swinging a strapful of

books and grinning at Janice and Nelson companionably. He was a sturdy boy with a good-humored face plentifully besprinkled with freckles.

"They can dock the *Constance Colfax* without our being there, Marty," Janice said.

"Hi tunket! they can't without *I* say so," her cousin flung back over his shoulder as he clattered on.

Nelson sighed. "You would not believe that boy stood well in his classes and had the benefit of my precept and example in speech for several hours each school day of the year."

"Marty is incorrigible, I fear," Janice returned, with a smile.

"He sheds his knowledge of polite English when he steps out of the school building just as a snake sheds its skin. He is perfectly hopeless."

"And at heart a perfect dear," announced Janice. "There's something better than even a knowledge of good English in Marty Day."

Nelson's eyes twinkled. "Do you know," he observed, "I suspect you are prejudiced in your cousin's favor?"

They reached the wharf just as the passengers landing at Polktown were streaming up from the boat. There were several commercial travelers bound for the Lake View Inn and the ministrations of Marm Parraday, who was now its overseeing spirit. Besides these there was but one disembarking

passenger. She attracted Janice Day's immediate attention.

"Look, Nelson; here comes Mrs. Scattergood. She's just returning from a visit to her son. Do you know, she is the first friend I made when I came to Polktown? She was on the boat that day coming over from the Landing."

"The old girl looks as spry as ever," said Nelson disrespectfully. "And I guarantee she already has her hammer out."

"Nelson! And you criticize Marty's language!" laughed Janice.

"There is some slang, young lady, that so adds to the forcefulness of English that the dictionaries adopt it. Say! are you going to stop for her?"

"Oh, I must, Nelson," Janice said with a rueful glance at the schoolmaster.

"Then, to quote my slangiest pupil again—good-*night!*" and Nelson went away cheerfully to greet several of the young men of the town grouped on the other side of the wharf.

"Well, well, Janice Day!" chirped the little old woman with a birdlike tilt of her head when the girl welcomed her. "You be a pleasant sight to see when a body comes home. And I *be* glad to get home. I tell my son's wife I can't make many more of these trips to Skunk's Holler. It's too fatiguing, and at my age I like my own bed and my own fireside. I s'pose Rill's well?"

"Very well—and very happy," said Janice softly, looking at the sharp-featured old woman with grave eyes.

"'Sthat so? Well, I s'pect she's relieved in her mind now the bar at the hotel is closed," snapped Mrs. Scattergood. "Hopewell Drugg can't go fur astray if he don't go playin' that fiddle of his to no more o' them dances. Though you can't trust no man too fur—that's been *my* experience with 'em."

"Oh, dear, me! how unfortunate you have been all your life, Mrs. Scattergood," sighed Janice. There was laughter in her eyes if her lips were grave. Mrs. Scattergood's fault-finding character was well known to the girl.

"Hi, Janice!" broke in Marty Day's voice, and he came puffing up the hill after his cousin and Mrs. Scattergood. "How-do, Miz' Scattergood? Did y'see Tom Hotchkiss come ashore?"

"Why, no, Marty. I did not notice him. Why?" Janice said.

"Dad wanted I should find out if he came home to-day. But I didn't see him."

"What's Jase Day want o' Tom Hotchkiss?" demanded Mrs. Scattergood sharply.

"I really couldn't say," Janice replied.

"Wal, he warn't on the boat; I can tell ye that. And to my notion Tom Hotchkiss is as onsartin a feller to figger on as any party in this town. He

was as full o' tricks as a monkey when he was a boy here; and he didn't onlearn none o' them, I'll be bound, all the years he was away, nobody knows where. I wouldn't trust Tom Hotchkiss with a nickel no further than I could swing an elephant by its tail."

"Oh my, Mrs. Scattergood! that wouldn't be far," laughed Janice. They came to the intersection of Hillside Avenue and High Street. "Well, I must leave you here. I'm glad to see you home again, and looking so well."

This was on Friday evening. Janice, happy and care-free, went home to help Aunt 'Mira prepare supper. There seemed nothing in the world now to trouble Janice Day and she had forgotten Aunt 'Mira's prognostications of evil.

News from Mexico—from dear daddy at the mine—had been very favorable for weeks. Of course, back in the girl's mind was always the fear, now lulled to sleep, that something bad might happen to Mr. Broxton Day down in battle-ridden Mexico. But the present de facto government seemed to favor American mining interests, and Mr. Day wrote very hopefully of the outlook for the future.

Uncle Jason Day, a silent man at best, came in to supper much as usual. In the midst of the meal there was a rap upon the kitchen door and Marty clumsily arose to answer the summons.

"Say, Dad!" the boy cried, "it's Aaron Whelpley. Says he wants to see you outside."

"What's *he* want o' ye, Jase?" asked Aunt 'Mira curiously, as her husband left the table. "Don't he clerk down to Tom Hotchkiss' store?"

Uncle Jase muttered something unintelligible and went out on the porch, closing the door carefully behind him. The air of expectancy over the three left at the supper table in the Day kitchen increased as the minutes passed.

"More secrets," said Mrs. Day lachrymosely. "I might's well be merried to the Shah of Pershy. I'd know jest as much about *his* business as I do about Jase Day's."

Marty only chuckled at his mother's complaint. Janice felt some little perturbation. It increased as Uncle Jason's absence continued. When finally he opened the door suddenly and almost staggered into the kitchen, his face blanched and his eyes expressing an emotion that she could not fathom, the girl leaped simultaneously to her feet and to a conclusion.

"It's daddy!" she gasped. "Something has happened again in Mexico! Oh, Uncle Jason! what is it?"

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING TROUBLES EVERYBODY

UNCLE JASON stood suddenly straighter and looked at his niece with clearing visage. His wife shrilled:

"Ye wanter scare ev'rybody out o' their seven senses, Jase Day? What's the matter of you?"

"Nothin'," stammered Mr. Day with dry lips.

"Is it about daddy?" questioned Janice again.

"No, 'tain't nothin' about Brocky," said Uncle Jason more stoutly. "I—I felt bad for a minute."

"What's the matter with you? Is it yer digestion again? If you air goin' to get *that* on ye at your time o' life where'll you be when you're an old man?" demanded Aunt 'Mira. "My victuals ain't never suited ye none too well——"

"I've et 'em for more'n twenty year, ain't I?" snapped her husband, sitting down heavily in his chair again.

"Under protest, I don't doubt," sighed Aunt 'Mira. "I know I ain't as good a cook as some."

"'The Lord sends the food but the devil sends the cooks,'" quoted Marty in an undertone to his cousin.

"You're good enough," Uncle Jason gruffly stated.

"Oh, no I ain't," was the mournful reply. "I know my risin' bread never did suit ye, Jase Day. And ye said yer mother's pies was fur an' away better'n mine."

"When'd I ever say that?" demanded the man.

"Jest after we was merried," Aunt 'Mira said, wiping her eyes on the corner of her apron.

"Oh, gee!" exploded Marty.

"Twenty year an more ago!" snorted Uncle Jason.

"Why, of course he doesn't think so *now*," urged Janice, seeking to oil the troubled waters of Aunt 'Mira's soul.

"Of all women!" groaned Mr. Day.

"Oh, no," sighed his wife, who was gradually working herself into a tearful state. "I know I ain't been the helpmeet you expected me to be, Jase Day." Uncle Jason snorted. "I know my failin's" —in a tone that admitted they were very few —"and I long ago seen ye didn't trust me, Jase. I never know nothin' about your business. I never know what ye aim to do till it's *done*. I never——"

"I snum!" cried Uncle Jase. "What is it ye wanter know? There ain't no satisfyin' you women."

Janice tried to smooth matters again. "I'm sure, Aunt 'Mira, if Uncle Jason doesn't always take

you into his confidence about business matters it's only because he wants to save you worry."

"Now you've said something," commented Marty vehemently, while his father looked at the girl gratefully.

"I dunno what she wants ter know," he said.

"Well," Aunt 'Mira put in quickly, showing that she was not at all lacking in shrewdness and that there might be method in her procedure, "what did that Aaron Whelpley want ter see ye for, f'rinstance?"

"Oh! him?" gasped Uncle Jason, flushing dully. "Why—jest nothin' at all! nothin' at all! Came to tell me—ahem!—Tom Hotchkiss hadn't come back yet."

"Why, I told you that, Dad!" ejaculated Marty in surprise.

"Ya-as—so ye did," faltered his father. "But Aaron knowed I wanted to see Tom——"

"What for?" demanded Aunt 'Mira, with an insistence in getting at the meat in the kernel that amazed Janice.

"Why—er—on business," admitted Mr. Day stumblingly.

"There it goes!" broke down Aunt 'Mira, fairly sobbing now. "Jest as soon as I wanter know about anything I *should* know about, I'm put down an' sat upon. Oh! Oh!"

"Woman! you're crazy!" ejaculated Mr. Day,

pushing back his chair hastily and leaving his supper but half eaten.

Janice ran to put her arms about Aunt 'Mira's plump and shaking shoulders, meanwhile motioning her uncle toward the sitting room. Marty, having finished, rose to follow his father.

"There!" sobbed Mrs. Day, "it's jest as I tell ye. He don't relish my victuals. He ain't et supper enough for a sparrow."

"Any sparrow that et what dad did," said Marty as he left the room, "would die of apoplexy! Turn off the water-works, Ma. That won't get you nothin'."

"Men air sech heartless critters," sobbed Aunt 'Mira.

"Why, you sound like Mrs. Scattergood!" declared Janice with a little laugh. "To hear her to-day——"

"Do tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Day briskly and wiping her eyes. "Is Miz' Scattergood home again?"

The cloud was dissipated from the good woman's mind as quickly as it had gathered. She bustled about with Janice, clearing the table and washing the supper dishes. Tears never left their mark upon Aunt Almira's smooth and plump cheeks.

But Janice had her doubts regarding Uncle Jason's peace of mind. Through the open doorway she saw him sitting by the reading lamp with his newspaper. She knew that he looked on the first

page only, and from the expression on his face doubted if he saw a word of the print before him. When she had polished the last plate she went in and patted his shoulder. He looked up at her with troubled eyes and the girl stooped and lightly kissed his cheek above the tangle of his beard.

"Of course it is really nothing about daddy?" she whispered.

"Not a-tall! Not a-tall, Niece Janice!" he declared. "It's jest—well—nothin'," and he lapsed into a gloomy silence.

The family life at the Day homestead was very different now from what it had been when Janice first came there to live. Like many people of the town, the Day family had got into a rut. Uncle Jason was frankly shiftless, although he was a good farmer and able to earn a fair wage at carpenter's work if he so desired.

Aunt Almira had grown hopeless and careless, too. Ambition seemed to have fled the Polktown Days completely, and Janice could scarcely realize that they were her father's relatives. Marty had been both a lazy and a saucy boy, associating with idle companions in the evenings and hating school only a degree less than he hated work.

It delighted the girl now to see her cousin at the sitting room table with his books. Marty was still no lover of learning; but he had an aim in view—he desired to become a civil engineer, and he had

learned that his present studies were necessary if he were to attain his goal.

Nowadays if Marty went out after supper it was to attend a meeting of the Boys' Club affiliated with the Public Library Association, or to go to "class meeting," which was a part of the social activities of the public school established by Nelson Haley.

Matters having quieted down after the supper-table eruption, Aunt 'Mira got her sewing basket and Janice her text-books. The girl was still attending the seminary at Middletown four days a week. She ran over in her Kremlin car her father had given her and returned each afternoon. She would continue to do this until snow flew, by which time it was hoped passenger trains would be running on the V. C. branch between Middletown and Polktown Landing.

Mrs. Day sighed heavily, just to let her husband know that the storm in her breast was not wholly assuaged; but Janice, busy with her studies, had forgotten all about the family bickering until she was suddenly aroused to the fact that it was now Uncle Jason and Marty who had locked horns.

"No. I sha'n't give you another cent!" Mr. Day said with vigor. "You have too much money to spend as it is."

"Gee, Dad!" groaned his son, "there *ain't* that much money, is there?"

Mr. Day snorted: "Young spendthrift! When

I was your age I never had ten cents a month for spending."

"Huh!" said Marty. "I'm glad I didn't know Gran'dad Day then. He must have been some tightwad."

"I saved my money—put it in the bank," snapped his father, who seemed very fretful indeed on this evening.

"Well, *I've* got money in the savings bank," sniffed Marty. "I s'pose I can take out some and get those hockey sticks and things I want. We're going to have a regular team this winter, Nelse Haley says, and play Middletown High."

"Ye'll not take a cent out of the bank, d'ye hear me?" said his father, more sharply. "Ye'd never had it there if yer mother hadn't opened the account for you and give ye the book."

"Well, now, Jason," put in Aunt 'Mira, "why shouldn't the boy have a little money to spend? All the other boys do. You air the clostest man——"

"Close? close?" repeated Uncle Jason, his voice rising shrilly. "You think I'm close, do you? Well, lemme tell ye, I'll be closer, and this fambly'll live a sight more economical in the future than it has in the past. We ain't got no money to fool away——"

"Aw, rats!" growled Marty under his breath, slamming shut his book and rising from the table. "That's always the way," he added. "Try to touch

you for a cent and you'd think you was losing a patch of your hide."

"Oh, Marty!" gasped Janice. "Don't!"

"It's your father's way," croaked Aunt 'Mira, rocking violently. "Tech him in the pocketbook an' ye tech him on the raw."

"By mighty!" ejaculated Mr. Day, crumpling his paper into a ball and throwing it on the floor. "If ever a man was so pestered——"

"They don't mean it, Uncle Jason! They don't mean it," cried Janice, almost in tears. "They don't understand. But something must be the matter—something is troubling you——"

"Well, why don't he tell then?" shrilled Mrs. Day. "If he's hidin' something——"

Her husband rose up and turned to glare at both her and his son. His face was apoplectic; his lips twitched. Janice had never seen him moved in this way before and even Aunt 'Mira looked startled.

"I *am* hidin' somethin'," the man said harshly. "I been hidin' it for weeks. I'll tell ye all what 'tis now. Ye'd know it soon enough anyway."

"Well, I vum!" murmured Aunt 'Mira. "Is he goin' ter finally tell it?"

"Get it off your chest, Dad," Marty said carelessly. "You'll feel better."

There was no sympathy expressed for him except in Janice Day's countenance. The man wet his lips, hesitated, and finally burst out with:

"I had an int'rest in Tom Hotchkiss' store. Ye all knowed that; but ye didn't know how much. I went on his notes—all of 'em. For nigh twelve thousand dollars. More'n I got in the world. More'n this place is wuth—an' the stock—*everything!* All I got in the world is gone if Tom Hotchkiss ain't an honest man, and it looks as though he'd run away and didn't intend to come back!"

CHAPTER III

MARTY SPEAKS OUT

THE silence of misunderstanding, almost of unbelief, fell upon the little group in the Day sitting room, shocked as it was by Uncle Jason's declaration. Janice could not find her tongue. Aunt 'Mira's fat face was as blank as a wall. Marty finally recovered breath enough to expel:

"Whew! Hi tunket! *That's* what was behind his red vest, was it? Has he really stung you, Dad?"

"But, Jase Day!" at last burst out Aunt 'Mira, "ye air jest a-scarin' us for nothin'. Of course you can levy on his goods."

"They're not paid for," Uncle Jason interrupted. "That's what Aaron found out for me. Tom got a line of credit I didn't know nothin' about. The jobbers and wholesalers have first call. There are no outstandin' accounts owin' the store; Tom did a spot cash business."

"But what did he do with the money he got on the notes you indorsed, Uncle Jason?" cried Janice.

"That's what I don't know," Mr. Day replied, sitting down heavily again and resting his head in both hands. "He's gone—and *it's* gone. That's all

I know. I found out to-day he hasn't got ten dollars to his account at the bank. The bank holds most of his notes, and of course they are goin' to come down on me as the notes fall due."

Mr. Day groaned very miserably. Salt tears stung Janice's eyelids.

"Cricky, Dad! can they take everything that belongs to us?" asked Marty, awestruck.

Mr. Day nodded. "Ev'ry endurin' thing. On an indorsement of a note even a man's tools and his household goods ain't exempt."

"Oh, Uncle!" cried Janice in pity.

"Well, then, Jase Day," gasped his wife, regaining her usual volubility, "what have I allus told ye? If ye'd put the homestead in my name they couldn't get that away from ye. It's what I allus wanted ye to do. And I ain't even got dower right in it, as I'd oughter have. Ye don't 'pear to have the sense ye was born with. Write your name on another man's note—an' for sech a feller as Tom Hotchkiss—when ye didn't know nothin' about him."

"I went to school with his father. Old Caleb Hotchkiss and me was chums," defended Uncle Jason weakly. "I allus thought Tom had it in him to make good."

"Oh, he's done good, it 'pears," snapped Aunt 'Mira. "He's done *you* good an' brown. Ye wouldn't tell me nothin' about it, 'cept ye'd invested

a little money in the store when 'twas first opened. That's what ye *said.*"

"And it was the truth," groaned Uncle Jason. "It was later I indorsed the notes."

"Serves you right for not takin' your lawful wife into your confidence," stormed Aunt 'Mira in mingled wrath and tears. "And now what's to become of us I'd like to know? Ev'rything we got taken from us! Kin they really do that, Jase?"

The man nodded his head miserably.

"Well, all I gotter say is that it's mighty hard on *me,*" complained Mrs. Day. "If you was fool enough to trust a scalawag like Tom Hotchkiss——"

"It wasn't two weeks ago you was speakin' so well of him," interrupted her husband, stung to the retort discourteous. "You said he was the smartest man in Polktown and if I'd been ha'f the man he was at his age I'd ha' made a fortune."

Marty suddenly laughed, high and shrilly. "Surely! surely!" he exploded. "You could easy make a fortune the same way Tom Hotchkiss done —by stealin' it from others."

"Well——" began his mother, when to Janice's, as well as his parents', vast surprise, her cousin suddenly dominated the occasion.

"You keep still, Ma! You've said enough. Dad didn't go for to do it, did he? He wasn't aimin' to lose his money and make us poor, was he? D'you think he did it a-purpose?"

"Well—no, Marty," admitted Mrs. Day, "I don't think he did. But——"

"Nuff said, then," declared the youngest of the Day clan briskly. "What's done's done. No use bawlin' over spilt sody-water," and he grinned more or less cheerfully. "What good did the money dad had in the bank ever do us? Not a bit! It might as well have been burnt up. We can hire this house to live in just as well's though we owned it, can't we? And not have to worry about taxes and repairs neither."

"Why, Marty!" murmured Janice, amazed by this outburst, yet somewhat impressed by the sounding sense of it.

"Hi tunket!" exploded her cousin, expanding as he looked around on his surprised relatives. "What does it matter, anyway? Ain't I here, Ma? Have you forgot I'm alive, Dad? Can't I go to work and earn money enough to support this family if I haf to? I—guess—yes! Why!" pursued the excited Marty, "I can go to work next week at Jobbin's sawmill an' earn my dollar-seventy-five a day. Sure I can! Or I bet I could get a job in some store. Or on the *Constance Colfax*—they pay deckhands a dollar-fifty. And there's the railroad goin' to open up.

"Pshaw! there's nothin' to it," declared the boy. "What if dad has got the rheumatism? *I* can work an' we won't starve."

"Marty!" cried Janice, running around the table and putting both arms about his neck. "You dear boy—*you're a man!*"

"Huh!" grunted Marty half strangled. "Who said I wasn't?"

"He's a good, dear child," sobbed his mother. "D'you hear him, Jase Day?"

"Yes," said Mr. Day brokenly. "I dunno but it's wuth while losin' ev'rything ye own to l'arn that ye got a boy like him."

Marty was suddenly smitten with a great wave of confusion. His enthusiasm had carried him out of himself. "Aw, well," he mumbled, "I was just tellin' you. You needn't worry. I can get a job."

"And I'll sell my car, Uncle," Janice said gayly. "That'll help some. And my board money. That comes regularly, thank goodness!

"Of course," she pursued, "as Marty says, we can hire the house to live in if you have to lose the dear old place. We'll be all right."

"'Tain't that. I can work yet," groaned Uncle Jase. "It's losin' all we've saved."

"Well! whose fault is that?" demanded his wife; but Janice stopped her.

"Now, Auntie, Marty's said the last word on *that* topic. Let us not waste our time in recrimination. We must get a new outlook on life, that is all."

"But all I gotter say——"

"You've said it, Ma, already," put in Marty. "Don't spread it on thicker. Dad ain't likely to forget it. You don't have to keep reminding him of it."

It was hard on the woman, this shutting off her speech. As with many shallow-minded folk, speech was Aunt 'Mira's safety valve. Afterward, when Uncle Jason had gone down town "to see about it" and Marty had accompanied him (the first time in all probability since he was a child the boy had ever willingly accompanied his father anywhere) the pent-up torrent of Aunt 'Mira's feelings burst upon Janice's head.

She put away her books with a sigh. The morrow was a school holiday, anyway. "Aunt 'Mira," she said softly, "don't you suppose Uncle Jason feels this thing keenly? Don't you think his very soul must be embittered because he has made this mistake?"

"Mistake!" repeated the fretful woman. "Needn't ha' been no mistake. If he'd asked me——"

"You would have been no wiser than he, Aunt 'Mira," Janice interrupted with confidence. "I know you. I remember how you had this Mr. Hotchkiss to tea here one night some months ago, and how pleasant he seemed. I expect that must have been when Uncle Jason was about to indorse his notes and he wanted your opinion of the man."

"Goodness, Janice! do you suppose so?" gasped Aunt 'Mira.

"Yes, I do. You know how uncle is—he doesn't talk much, but he thinks a lot of your opinion. And I know he must feel worse over losing your confidence than over losing the money."

"Why, he ain't lost my confidence!" cried her aunt. "I know he never meant to do it."

"Then tell him so when he comes home, dear," Janice whispered with her arms about her aunt's neck. "Don't be harsh to him at a time when he needs all the sympathy we can give him."

Aunt Almira cried a little, then wiped her eyes and kissed her niece.

"You're a great comfort, Janice. What we should do without you I dunno. An' I guess ye air right. We women only hafter suffer for a man's fool tricks. But the man has to suffer and make good for 'em, too. Poor Jase!"

CHAPTER IV

"I TOLD YOU SO"

JANICE thought at once of her father when this serious trouble for Uncle Jason and the family arose. She said nothing about doing so, but before going to bed that night she wrote Mr. Broxton Day about his brother's trouble.

Janice's father was considerably younger than his half-brother, had seen a deal more of the world than Jason Day, and had accumulated a much larger fortune than the plodding Polktown farmer and carpenter ever hoped or expected to possess.

Uncle Jason was inclined to criticize Mr. Broxton Day for "putting all his eggs in one basket," as he had done in investing in mining property in Chihuahua, Mexico. But now it seemed as though Uncle Jason, shrewd as he thought himself, had made a similar mistake. He had backed Tom Hotchkiss beyond the value of all his property, both real and personal.

The investment of Janice's father in the Mexican mine had paid him well until insurrection broke out in the district. The superintendent then in charge

of the mine had run away while the workmen had joined the insurrectos.

It was necessary for somebody to go down into the troubled country and "do something," and the duty devolved upon Mr. Broxton Day of all the men financially interested in the mining project. He had hastened to the mine while Janice came to Polktown to live during his absence. Of course, neither supposed this parting was for long. Now more than three years had passed, during which time there had been more than one occasion when Mr. Day was in danger of losing his life.

He had managed to hold the property for himself and his business associates, however, and had made friends among most of the warring factions fretting Chihuahua. Of late he had been able to hire workmen and get out ore. The profits began to roll in again. Mr. Broxton Day's share of these profits for a month was more than Uncle Jason saw in cash for several years.

"We must help him, Daddy," wrote Janice. "He has been the dearest man—so kind to me, as they all have been; but Uncle Jason particularly. He is not naturally demonstrative. His actions speak louder than words. He backed me up, you know, when I was arrested for speeding my car that time. And when Nelson was in trouble over those stolen gold

coins Uncle Jason went on his bail bond and hired the lawyer to defend him.

"We must do all we can for him. The next letter I write you, dear Daddy, will contain the full particulars of his difficulties—when the notes come due and their amounts. Meanwhile you can be thinking it over and planning in that perfectly wonderful brain of yours, how best to help Uncle Jason ward off disaster."

This kind attitude toward Uncle Jason in his trouble was not assumed by many, as Janice had foretold. A man like Jason Day in a community like Polktown was bound to win disapproval from many of his neighbors.

In the first place "those Days" had been looked upon as shiftless and of little account. Janice's activities had done much to change that opinion; but there were yet families in Polktown that did not number Aunt Almira on their calling lists. Moreover, until the recent town meeting when Uncle Jason, under Janice's spur, had been so active in the no license campaign, he had been on the "wrong side" in politics. Uncle Jason was not of the political party that has made Vermont as "rock-bound" as her own Green Mountains.

So, there were many who, when they heard of Mr. Day's difficulties, said it served the "tight-fisted fellow" just right. And many who might better

have remembered Uncle Jason's unfailing if somewhat grim neighborly kindness, whispered and smirked as they discussed the story in public. At the best, most of his friends proved to be of the I-told-you-so variety. When it became publicly known that Tom Hotchkiss had absconded with the funds and the door of his "emporium" was shut, there was scarcely a person in Polktown who, it seemed, could not have told Uncle Jason Tom was dishonest.

It was on Saturday evening, following a long day of sore worry for Uncle Jason, ending in the certain knowledge that scarcely a dollar's worth of property had been left behind by Hotchkiss to meet his liabilities, that Nelson Haley came over to supper, as he often did on this evening in the week. They were still lingering around the supper table when Walky Dexter came stumping up the porch steps.

"Jefers-pelters! still eatin'?" he cackled. "All the fambly here? Where's *your* gal, Marty?"

"Haven't got none," declared the boy with a scowl as positive as his double negative.

"What?" exploded Walky in apparent surprise. "Then I be needin' spectacles, jest as my ol' woman says. I thought I seen you hangin' around Hope Drugg's store more'n a little lately; and I vum I thought 'twas you 't sat beside little Lottie at the Ladies' Aid supper t'other night an' treated her to

ice-cream till the child liketer bust—er—haw! haw! haw!"

"Aw, you don't need glasses, Walky. What *you* need is blinders," growled Marty with some impatience.

"Ya-as; I've been tol' that before," said the incorrigible joker. "Folks don't take kindly to the idee of my havin' sech sharp eyes, neither. I undertook to tell *you* a thing or two, Jase, some time ago 'bout that Tom Hotchkiss; but ye wouldn't see it with my eyes."

"If I seen everything and everybody in the town the way you seen it, Walky, I'd get as twisted as a dumbed sas'fras root," snarled Uncle Jason.

"Ye wouldn't ha' been so twisted about Tom," Walky said placidly. He was as thick-skinned as a walrus and the cut direct did not in the least trouble him.

"I tell ye, I 'member what that feller was when he was a boy," he pursued. "Bad blood, there—bad blood."

"By mighty!" ejaculated Uncle Jason. "Cale Hotchkiss was as square a feller as ever walked on sole-leather. I'm glad he's dead. If he'd lived to see his son turn out so bad——"

"'Twarn't Caleb Hotchkiss' blood I was referrin' to," Walky struck in. "Caleb merried one o' them Pickberry gals over to Bowling. An' you know well enough what them Pickberrys was. As for this

here Tom, he was as sly as a skunk-bear when he was a boy."

"For goodness' sake!" interrupted Janice, hoping to divert the tide of Walky's talk. "What is a 'skunk-bear'?"

"Wolverine," explained her cousin quickly. "And the meanest creature that ever got on a line of traps. Hey, Walky?"

"Now you've said it, boy," agreed the expressman. "An' that remin's me of one of the meanest things that Tom Hotchkiss done when he was a boy."

"Oh, well!" grunted Uncle Jason, who evidently disliked the discussion of Tom's short-comings. "They say George Washington cut down his father's favorite cherry tree; yet he grew up to be president."

"Huh! but he didn't lie about it—*that's* why he got to be president," said the astute Walkworthy. "And Tom Hotchkiss lied about this mean thing *he* done."

"Wal! let's have it," Mr. Day said, with a sigh. "It'll choke ye I can plainly see if ye ain't allowed to unburden your soul."

Walky began to stuff his pipe out of Mr. Day's tobacco sack that he had appropriated from the shelf beside the door.

"Ye see," he said, "Tom worked for ol' man Ketcham a while—him that run the dairy farm

over Middletown way. But Tom never did work long in one place when he was a boy. *That* oughter told ye something, Jase."

Mr. Day grunted. Marty said:

"Go on with your story, Walky. Who told you you was the law and the prophets?"

"I was prophet enough about how Tom Hotchkiss was a-comin' aout," chuckled Walky. "Wal! howsomever, old Ketcham run quite a dairy for them days. He bought up all the neighbors' milk, too, and made butter and cheese. I expect 'twould ha' been called a crematory to-day"

"Ho, ho!" shouted Marty. "That's a hot one. Creamery, you mean, Walky."

"Oh, do I?" said the unruffled Mr. Dexter. "Wal, mebbe I do. Anyhow, he stood Tom and his tricks quite a spell—he was slow to wrath, was old Ketcham, bein' a Quaker by persuasion; but bimeby Tom got too much for him and he turned him away. Tom was a great practical joker—oh, yes! But he was one o' them kind that gits mad when the joke's turned on themselves. So he was sore on the Ketchams."

"Huh! he ain't the only one geared that-a-way," put in Mr. Day.

"No; but he was about the only feller I ever knowed that 'ud ha' thunk up sech a mean way of gittin' square with old Ketcham."

"What did he do?" demanded Marty, becom-

ing impatient at the expressman's leisurely tale, while Aunt 'Mira got up and began to stir about the kitchen, clearing the supper table. She often confessed to Janice that it gave her legs "the twidgets" to listen to one of Walky's long-drawn-out stories.

"Why—he, he!—'twas funny, tubbesure. The old man stored his butter in a stone spring-haouse. The spring was under the floor and cooled the place nicely. Both ends of the buildin' was jest slats 'bout an inch apart, so's to let the air through but keep most critters aout.

"Now, jest about the time old man Ketcham got through with Tom Hotchkiss, Tom, he discovered there was a ol' she-skunk with a young fambly in the neighborhood. 'Tain't no trick a-tall to l'arn when a polecat is located near by, ye know; all ye gotter do, as the fellers says, is ter foller yer nose—haw! haw! haw!

"Tom was mad clean through when Mr. Ketcham turned him away. Didn't take him long, I vum! ter link up them skunks with his idea of vengeance—nossir!" Walky said reflectively. "And he perceeded to put his idee into practice."

"What did he do, Walky?" asked Marty again. "Ye might give us a hint."

"Oh, I'm gittin' to it," said the expressman placidly. "He toled them skunks into the spring-haouse. That's what he done."

"How?" asked Marty, now interested, while the

other listeners expressed their several opinions of the young rascal's trick.

"Lard. A lard trail. Skunks love lard er any grease. Tom laid the trail to the spring-haouse and then yanked off two of the lower slats. Plenty room for the biggest skunk livin' to git through. Then he chucked a lump of grease inside, after which he skun out."

"And what happened, Walky?" Janice asked.

"Why, when ol' Miz' Ketcham went aout to the spring-haouse in the morning, there was Miz' Skunk an' four skunk kittens camping in the middle of the floor. She seen 'em through the slats an' didn't darest open the door."

"Couldn't she frighten them out?" asked Nelson.

"Schoolmaster!" said Walky, chuckling, "I'm surprised at your ignerance. Ye sartain sure don't know much about the nature of skunks."

"I admit my failing," Nelson said, smiling. "I've never been much interested in skunk-ology."

"Ye might be—an' with profit," said Walky, more briskly. "I understand their fur's wuth more'n most animals ye kin trap nowadays.

"Howsomever, the skunk is 'bout the boldest critter that runs wild. Let 'em alone and they'll let you alone. But they ain't afeard of nothin' on two laigs or four—or that flies in the air, neither. When ye see a skunk in the path, go 'round it."

"We do," chuckled Marty. "He's got right of way."

"An' don't never try to chase one or poke one—'nless ye have a mighty long pole," said Walky Dexter. "Miz' Ketcham, she knowed that. The skunk an' her four kittens was camped in that spring-haouse an' they seemed to like it. No way of coaxin' 'em aout and there was two hunder' pound o' June butter in the place."

"Oh!" exclaimed Janice.

"Dear suz!" was Aunt 'Mira's comment. "Why didn't they shoot 'em?"

"Huh!" grunted Uncle Jason.

"The man ain't never drawed the breath o' life yet could shoot a skunk quick enough," Walky declared. "No, ma'am! And there was five in that bunch. Miz' Ketcham was jest as mad as she could be. She knowed that if anything riled 'em while they was quartered in that spring-haouse ev'ry pound of butter stored there would be sp'ilt.

"While they was projectin' around, and a-wonderin' what to do about it, a little fice-dog they owned settled things for 'em—and settled it quick. He was a fool dog and he proberbly took old Lady Skunk for a tabbycat. Seein' her inside the spring-haouse he nosed around till he found the openin' she'd got in by. He squeezed himself in an' then —wal, good-*night!*

"They heard the dog a ky-yi-ing and smelled the

smoke of battle from afar—haw! haw! haw! Jefers-pelters!" ejaculated Walky. "They tell me that after they'd burned all the butter an' butter firkins an' the hull inside of the spring-haouse—purgin' by fire as the Good Book says—the odor still lingered.

"An' that's one o' the tricks Tom Hotchkiss done. Lied about it, o' course. Said he didn't. But to them that was his cronies he boasted about it. I had *my* doubts of him when he come back to Polktown, nobody knowed from where; and I could ha' told ye, Jase——"

"Too late! too late!" groaned Mr. Day. "All you hind-sight prophets can't do me no good."

It was a bitter cry, and Aunt 'Mira sniveled as she stood over the dish-pan. Marty shuffled heavily as he grabbed his cap and made his way toward the door.

"I'm goin' over to the lib'ry for a book," he explained huskily, and went out.

Janice and Nelson soon retired to the sitting room while the three older people carried on a desultory conversation for the next hour. Suddenly there came a tapping on the sitting room window by Nelson's chair. He pulled aside the shade a little and glanced out.

What he saw made him start suddenly to his feet. "Who is it?" asked Janice, busy with the fancy-work in her lap.

"Somebody who evidently wishes to speak with me in private," Nelson told her with a smile. "I'll be right back."

He went out through the kitchen and found Marty standing in the yard—a very white-faced and trembling Marty, quite unlike his usual self.

"What is it? What has happened?" the schoolmaster asked sharply.

"Oh, Mr. Haley! I can't tell her—I can't let her know it."

"Whom are you talking about—your mother?"

"No. It's Janice."

"What has happened to Janice?" demanded Nelson, his voice changing.

"It's her dad—it's Uncle Brocky!" gasped Marty. "It's in to-day's New York paper. I just happened to see it as they was putting it on the file. I got it here," and the boy drew the folded newspaper from his pocket.

CHAPTER V

JANICE GOES HER WAY

"COME over to the garage," said Nelson Haley, seizing the boy by the wrist. "Is it unlocked?"

"Yes," gulped Marty.

"I can read it in the light of the side lamp of the car," said the schoolmaster.

His own voice was shaken. He knew that something very serious must have occurred or Marty Day would not act in this manner.

They hurried across the yard and Marty unbarred the garage door. Nobody in Polktown thought of locking any outbuilding, save possibly the corn-crib or the smoke-house.

Marty closed the door tightly before Nelson scratched a match and fumbled for the latch of the kerosene side lamp of Janice's automobile. In the yellow radiance of this he unfolded the newspaper Marty had seized at the public library. The schoolmaster looked at once at the extreme right-hand column of the front page of the paper—the column in which the Mexican news was usually displayed. A sub-heading caught his eye almost instantly:

MORE AMERICANS BUTCHERED

A great revolt had again broken out against the de facto government. It was spreading, the report said, hourly. In the Companos District the wires had been cut, but it was known that there had been much bloodshed there. Several of the former insurrecto leaders who had recently gone over to the existing party in power at Mexico City, were reported assassinated, among them Juan Dicampa.

"And he was Mr. Day's friend—he served him well during the last uprising in that district!" Nelson ejaculated.

"That ain't the worst. Read on," breathed Marty.

"Great heavens! can it be possible?" whispered Nelson.

"The mines in the Companos District have all been seized by the insurrectos. The peons working them have been forced into the ranks of the revolutionists. Not an American has escaped from the district and several are known to have been killed. At the Alderice Mine, fourteen miles north of San Cristoval, it is said the superintendent, B. Day, has been wounded and is held prisoner."

"Wh—what do you know about *that?*" stuttered Marty. "Uncle Brocky's hurt and they won't let him go."

"Hush!" commanded Nelson.

"Aw—there's nobody to hear," choked the boy. "And how can we keep it from Janice?"

"We must!" exclaimed Nelson.

"Say, Nelson Haley! You got to be mighty smart to keep Janice from finding out every little thing. You know that. And she's always looking for something to happen to Uncle Brocky."

"We can do it. We *must* do it," responded the schoolmaster.

Marty was round-eyed and unbelieving. "Say! you don't know Janice yet," he repeated with assurance. "She's a mighty smart girl—the smartest girl in the whole of Polktown. Aw—well, you ought to know."

"I don't know how we are to do it—yet," the schoolmaster agreed. "We'll just *have* to. When people have to do a thing, Marty, *they do it nine times out of ten!*"

"Hi tunket!" gasped the boy. "You tell me my part and I'll help all right."

"Come on, then. Stroll in naturally. Make believe there is something up—some joke that we are going to keep Janice out of——"

"Joke!" groaned Marty.

"I tell you," commanded Nelson hotly, "we've got to keep this from her. Her father wounded—think of it!"

"Ain't I thinking of it?" put in the boy. "Uncle

Brocky—that I never did see since I was a kid too small to remember him."

"Pull yourself together, old man," said the schoolmaster with his arm over the boy's shoulder.

Nelson's trust in him did much to enable Marty to brace up. He gulped down his sobs and drew his jacket sleeve across his eyes. "You just tell me what to do," he choked.

"I don't know myself yet. I'll keep this paper. I'll leave it to you to divert the New York paper from the library. You can do that, for the postmaster will give you the library mail if you're there on time for it."

"I'll be there," Marty declared.

"We'll tell Walky——"

"Oh—Jehoshophat!" gasped Marty. "*He* leaks like a sieve. Might's well tell the town crier as tell Walky."

"We'll mend his leak," the schoolmaster said grimly. "Walky loves Janice. We'll easily shut his mouth. Perhaps we can warn other people so that no word will be let drop. I can learn, I suppose, who takes this paper."

"Oh, hookey!" groaned Marty suddenly. "The hull town'll know it next Thursday if they don't before."

"Why so?"

"That is the day the Middletown *Courier* comes out. They had a big piece in it about Uncle Brocky

before. They'll grab this story like a hungry dog does a bone. It's *news.*"

"You have a head on your shoulders, boy," admitted Nelson Haley, and all but groaned himself. He would not give way to despair. "I'll think about that. I'll find some way of keeping the *Courier* out of town."

"And Janice riding right over there to school four days a week," suggested Marty.

"I never thought of that," muttered Nelson.

"'Most everybody takes the *Courier* here in Polktown. An', oh gee! there's dad's *Ledger.* She might get hold of that."

"If you can't stop *that* coming to the house you're no good," declared Nelson.

"Oh, I'll stop it. Dad'll have a fit though. He swears by the *Ledger.* But ma don't care for nothin' but the *Fireside Favorite,* and there won't be any Mexican news in *that.*"

"We must be on the watch to keep every line of communication closed—to keep Janice ignorant of this at least until the facts are better known. Perhaps they will be disproved. I'll write to-night to Washington. And you get me the name of that friend of Mr. Broxton Day's down there on the Border who communicated with Janice once before when it looked as though your uncle was lost. Remember?"

"Sure!" agreed Marty.

"I'll tell Walky to-night. You find a chance to speak to your father and mother. Be sure Janice doesn't hear you."

"Some job!"

"Well, it's *our* job. Understand?" Nelson said earnestly.

"I'm with you, Mr. Haley," the boy responded, quite recovered from his first disturbance of mind. "You can bank on me."

"Great boy!" Nelson said, patting him on the shoulder again. "Janice has done so much—so much for the town, so much for us all! We should be able to do something to secure her peace of mind, Marty."

"Hi tunket! I believe you, Mr. Haley."

"Then, come on! It may prove to be a false alarm as before. We'll save her all the anxiety possible."

"Sure we will!" agreed the boy again with emphasis.

They re-entered the house; Marty was even able to call up a giggle and winked broadly at Nelson as he hung up his hat and looked up the parchesi board and the rest of the outfit for that popular game.

"What's a-goin' on now 'twixt you two boys?" asked Aunt Almira comfortably, for she looked upon Nelson, when he came to the house, as she would had he been Marty's brother. "D'ye know what's up, Janice?"

"I haven't an idea," her niece said happily. "I fancy Marty has a joke on somebody."

"'Joke!'" repeated her cousin in such an unconsciously tragic tone that the schoolmaster hastened to say:

"He thinks he is going to beat Walky playing parchesi. Come on, Walky. Show him you have all your wits about you."

"I'm dumbed if I don't!" declared Mr. Dexter, laying aside his pipe to cool. "Who else is a-goin' to play?"

"Not I," said Janice. "Christmas is coming and preparedness is my motto."

"I want ma to play then," Marty said. "She an' I'll play partners and I bet we beat Mr. Haley and Walky out o' their boots."

"Sakes alive, child! you don't want me to play, do ye?" chuckled Aunt 'Mira. "Your father says I ain't got head enough for any game—an' I guess he's right."

"I'll risk ye," said her son, and they really had a very hilarious game while Janice sewed placidly and Uncle Jason looked on, forgetting for the time some of the burden on his mind.

"I'll go along with you, Walky," the schoolmaster said when the game broke up and it was time for the callers to go. "I can cut through your back lots to High Street and reach Mrs. Beaseley's quite as easily as by the other route."

"Proud to hev ye," said Walky. "Good-night, folks. That 'pears to be a funny lookin' necktie you're knitting for Mr. Haley, Janice."

"It's not a necktie and it's not for Nelson," Janice replied, flushing a little and quickly hiding the fleecy article on which she had been working.

"Oh well," chuckled Walky, "I don't 'spect we've got airy right to have eyes in our heads even as long before Christmas as this time. Good-night, everybody."

He went out. Nelson, although he lingered to say something in a low tone to Janice, was right behind the expressman. He went up Hillside Avenue with Walky talking to him seriously.

Marty became woefully nervous when the family was left alone. He went to the water pail half a dozen times. He put out the cat; then let her in again it seemed just for the purpose of shooing her out once more.

Janice, quite unconscious of her cousin's disturbance of mind, finally put away her work and took up her candle.

"Good-night, all!" she said, yawning openly. She kissed her uncle's cheek, and Aunt 'Mira returned with warmth the caress with which she was favored. "Night, Marty."

"Huh!" the boy said huskily, "am I a stepchild? Don't I ever get kissed no more?"

"Why, Marty Day!" cried Janice, laughing. "A

great big boy like you! I thought you abhorred such 'girlie' ways."

"Sometimes I do," he said, approaching her boldly. "But to-night——"

He seized her like a young bear and kissed her fiercely. "You're—you're a mighty nice girl, Janice, if you *are* only my cousin," he said, averting his eyes.

She laughed and patted his cheek lightly. Then carrying the lighted candle she went up to bed with a parting nod and smile to her uncle and aunt.

Marty stood close to the stair door and listened at the crack till he was sure she had entered her own room and closed her door. His mother asked wonderingly:

"What ever is the matter o' you, Marty Day? I never see your beat."

"Sh!" the boy said, his face suddenly displaying all the fear and anxiety he had been hiding.

His father took his bedtime pipe from his lips and stared. "What ever is it's got you?" he asked.

The boy leaned over the table. Like conspirators, with their heads close together, the three talked in whispers. After Aunt Almira's first involuntary cry of horror, which she smothered at once, their voices never reached a key that could have made them audible ten feet away.

Meanwhile the schoolmaster and Walky Dexter were in close consultation. Nelson had made no

mistake when he took the expressman into the plot. Walky was by nature a chatterer and a gossip, but he would have cut off his right hand rather than hurt Janice Day. While Janice made ready for bed plans were forming to hide from her as long as possible—until the newspaper story could be verified at least—that which had come over the telegraph wires from Mexico.

The girl was less troubled by fears for her father's safety than she had been for a long time. It was of Uncle Jason's trouble she thought. And she was quite sure her father would be able to help his brother considerably in straightening out the difficulty that confronted Jason Day.

It had been figured out just what it would cost to renew the notes and pay interest on them, if the bank would allow Mr. Day to do that. Over seven hundred dollars per year! An enormous sum for Uncle Jason to contemplate—while the principal would hang over him like a threatening cloud. The interest money alone was more than he could easily earn over and above the family's living expenses.

He had got into the toils of the cunning Hotchkiss through lending the storekeeper a small sum at eight per cent. in the beginning and being paid promptly. The bank carried the notes for six per cent. of course.

The morrow was Sunday. Janice went her usual calm way. People seemed rather nicer to her than

usual, but their attitude did not arouse her suspicions in the least. At church there seemed to be more groups than usual both before and after service who whispered together. Mr. Middler, the pastor, who loved Janice as he might his own daughter, added a warmer pressure to his handclasp. Mrs. Middler kissed her several times, and Janice thought with some surprise that the affectionate woman had been crying. Elder Concannon, that stern and bewhiskered patriarch who had once looked upon Janice Day and her ideas as the very leaven of unrighteousness in the community, strode over to the girl and rested his hands upon her shoulders to make her look up at him.

"Ha!" he said. "Just as brave as ever, are you? You're not fearing the future, my girl?"

"How can I when the past has been so lovely?" she asked him soberly.

"Ha!" and he wagged his head. "So *that's* the way the past has seemed to you, eh?"

He said no more; but Janice wondered what the matter was with Elder Concannon. He was so seldom demonstrative.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHADOW OF COMING EVENTS

NELSON HALEY was not at church that Sunday. He was seen to ride away with Walky Dexter early in the morning and they took the lower Middletown road. When they returned late in the afternoon they assured each other that they had accomplished much.

They had prepared the way for Janice when she should go to the seminary on Monday—and more. It seemed to Janice that week as though the girls had never before been so nice to her. One of the instructors kept her in the office it was true when she arrived on Monday, over a really trivial matter, while the principal was addressing the student body; but the subject of the principal's address did not interest Janice, she learned later, she being only a day pupil. In fact she was merely taking a post-graduate course in certain studies.

Nor did she imagine that the editor of the Middletown *Courier* went to his office that Monday morning and "killed" a two-column news feature he had planned for the front page, as well as an

editorial and a certain " intimate note " of neighborhood gossip under the heading of " Polktown Activities."

Nelson Haley was not omnipotent. He could not reach everybody or foretell all combinations of events that might reveal to Janice her father's peril. But he had done his best. *The Weekly Courier* would not mention Mexican matters in its Thursday's issue. Meanwhile Nelson, with Uncle Jason and Mr. Middler, the pastor of the Polktown Union Church, as a self-appointed committee, endeavored to get the truth from the Border regarding the uprising in the Companos District and particularly the facts of the situation at the Alderdice Mine.

Janice Day's cheerfulness was almost uncanny. She had determined to be cheerful and optimistic about the Day homestead because she knew that her uncle and aunt were so cast down. She was not at all surprised therefore by their frequently solemn countenances and their whispering in corners together.

When she found Aunt 'Mira in tears she comforted her, believing that it was because of her husband's troubles that the woman wept. That Marty should wear a cloud of gloom most of the time merely proved how deeply the boy had been stirred by his father's trouble.

If Uncle Jason was distrait was it any wonder? His lawyer could give him little comfort, Janice

understood, regarding the settlement of the absconding storekeeper's notes. A search for assets was being made; but it looked as though Tom Hotchkiss had intended to be dishonest from the start and had laid all his plans accordingly and with judgment worthy of a better cause.

Already attempts were being made to find the absent storekeeper. It was suspected that he had gone to Canada. If he remained there it might be possible to lay hands upon him, for his act constituted a felony and he could be extradited.

"Wherever he's gone," said Uncle Jason gloomily, "he's gone fast and he's gone fur. No doubt o' that. And 'nless he lost the money in speculation or the like, he's probably hid it where *we* can't find it. It looks like we wouldn't be able to lay our han's on him before the first note goes to protest."

Being so sure of her father's good judgment, his willingness and his ability to help Uncle Jason, Janice Day's heart was still free from any deeper care as the days went by. As she had told Elder Concannon, the past had been so lovely to her, why should she fear the future?

Marty had been urged to remain at school for the present; but the boy was in earnest when he said he was willing and ready to do his share toward the support of the family. Indeed, he obtained a place in Partlett's store to work on the books and write

out statements every day after school and until late on Saturday evenings. This saved his self-respect, as he felt, and was not a bad thing for him at all. He was to give his mother the four dollars a week Mr. Partlett promised him.

A letter from Broxton Day (the last Janice was destined to receive from her father for a long time, did she but know it) arrived early in the week following the inception of the conspiracy for Janice's peace of mind. It was a cheerful, jolly letter and the girl had it tucked in the bosom of her blouse when she halted her car on the way back from Middletown on Wednesday afternoon before Hopewell Drugg's store.

When Janice opened the store door the place was empty; but from the rear came the quavering notes of a violin. Being drawn from the wailing strings was a new harmony—new, that is, for Hopewell Drugg. He was fond of the old tunes; but for the most part his musical tastes ran to cheerful ballads or love songs.

Janice, tiptoeing quietly across the shop floor, listened with a rather wistful little smile upon her lips. Like a big bee Hopewell Drugg was humming the words of the song so popular forty years ago when sung by a certain silver-voiced singer:

"'Rock-a-bye, baby, on the tree top,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock.

If the bough breaks the cradle will fall;
Down will come cradle, baby and all!
Then, it's rock-a-bye, rock-a-bye, mother is near;
And it's rock-a-bye, rock-a-bye, nothing to fear.
If the bough breaks the cradle will fall;
Down will come cradle, baby and all!' "

"Oh, Mr. Drugg!" murmured Janice, coming into the back room where the bespectacled storekeeper was playing. "That is so pretty! And the time and rhythm are just perfect, aren't they?"

"How-do, Miss Janice?" he said, reddening almost boyishly. "Thank you."

"Is Miss 'Rill inside?" Janice asked, for it was difficult to remember to call the storekeeper's wife by any name but that to which she had responded for so many years while she taught the Polktown ungraded school.

"You'll find her there," said Hopewell with a gesture of his bow. "Go right in—do."

Janice ran across the open porch and into the sitting room. The light-haired and pink-cheeked little woman, who sat sewing by the table, looked up with lips parted for a startled cry. The tiny garment with which she had been busily and so happily engaged was covered flutteringly by her apron while a faint flush dyed her cheeks.

"Oh! is it you, Janice dear?" she said and in a relieved tone.

"'Tis I, honey," cried the girl, running around back of her. She stooped and kissed the flushed cheek—oh! so tenderly—dropping into 'Rill's lap a little parcel.

"What is it? For *me*?" queried the storekeeper's wife, twitching briskly at the knotted string of Janice's parcel. "You are always bringing me some gift, dear girl."

"But—but this isn't exactly for you," Janice said with some hesitation.

"No?" She unwrapped the tissue covering. Then: "Oh, Janice! how sweet!" She held up the little fleecy cap of Janice's own knitting before her eyes in which the tears trembled. "And bootees, too! You darling!"

Janice sat down and they talked happily.

Since 'Rill Scattergood and Hopewell Drugg had married, their life together—save for a few weeks—had been very happy. And now a greater and holier happiness was on the way to them. Sharing the secret was one of the sweetest experiences that had ever come into Janice Day's life.

"I must put these away," 'Rill said, smiling. "Little Lottie will soon be home from school."

"No, work away," Janice said, rising. "I promised Lottie a ride in my car. I'll meet her

before she comes in. I suppose she is as inquisitive as a magpie?"

"Just about," was the response. "The dear child!"

It was as Janice descended the broad store steps that little Lottie appeared. And not so little now. Her father declared she was "growing like a weed."

She caught sight of Janice and ran, delighted, toward her, shouting a greeting:

"Oh, Janice Day! My Janice Day! May I ride with you?"

She had great, violet eyes and a mane of hair that was now becoming tawny—darkening as she grew older. Her vivid face and dancing feet made Lottie seem a fairylike little person, a veritable ray of sunshine, in Hopewell Drugg's dim old store.

During the long time in which she had suffered blindness and when her hearing and speech both threatened to leave the child, Lottie had flitted about almost uncannily. Even now she retained the habit of shutting her eyes and "seeing" with the tips of her fingers—that more than natural sense that is vouchsafed those who are blind.

"See my new coat! Isn't it pretty and blue? Papa sent to Boston for it. And see my pretty blue beads? Mamma 'Rill gave them to me. Aren't they lovely?" crowed Lottie.

Mrs. Scattergood came along the flagstone walk in season to hear this.

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" she sniffed. "All very fine, I dessay. Fine feathers make fine birds, I've heard."

"And do ugly feathers make ugly birds?" asked Lottie wonderingly.

"Never you mind! never you mind!" said the tart old woman, going up the store steps. "*Your* nose will soon be out o' joint, young lady."

Lottie felt her pretty nose and looked at Janice seriously.

"Do—do you s'pose it will?" she queried.

"Do I suppose what will?" the older girl asked, preparing to start the car.

"My nose."

"What about your nose?"

"Will it be put out of joint? It doesn't feel so."

Janice wanted to laugh. Then she felt like crying a little. But finally she became angry with the ill-natured Mrs. Scattergood. The latter had ever been a carping critic of the Drugg household—particularly since her daughter had married her old-time sweetheart quite against Mrs. Scattergood's wishes.

"Don't worry about your pretty nose, Lottie," Janice said rather gruffly. "Nothing she can say will put it out of joint."

CHAPTER VII

ECHOES

"LET'S go down to the cove, Janice Day, and call on my echo," Lottie said eagerly. "Do you know, I haven't been there for ever so long. My echo must be awfully lonely with nobody to shout to him any more."

"If you like," the older girl said smilingly, "we will go there first."

"Oh, yes!"

Janice turned the car skillfully in the narrow street. She could even safely wave her hand to Mrs. Beaseley who looked from her sitting room window across the street, where Nelson Haley boarded.

There were other people who waved to Janice, or who spoke to her, as the car rolled down the hill. Here was Mr. Cross Moore wheeling his invalid wife in her chair around and around the smooth, graveled walks of their garden. Janice stopped her car and shut off the engine here.

"Good-day, Mrs. Moore. How are you feeling this lovely weather?" Janice asked.

"Ha! fooling away your time same's usual, are

you?" snapped the invalid, disapproval written large on her querulous features.

"She's feeling pretty well, for her," Mr. Moore said placidly. "But we hate to see winter coming. Then she can't get out of doors so much."

"I wish you would let me take you out in the car sometimes, Mrs. Moore," Janice said, smiling. "You could see the country while it is so beautiful."

"Huh! risk my neck and bones bein' driven about in one o' them things by a silly girl? Not much!"

"I guess she'd feel safer if I was shoofer," said Cross Moore grimly. "And I've a mind to get one o' them things next year."

"You will *not,* Cross Moore!" cried his wife, who made it a practice to oppose every suggestion —verbally, at least.

"Oh, I dunno," said the man cheerfully. "You know I've shoofered you in this here chair for many a year without an accident. I reckon I could graduate to an automobile seat pretty easy."

"Why! it's just as e-asy to learn," Janice said, smiling. "And think how far and how quickly you could go, Mrs. Moore."

"Huh! Why should I wish to go far or quick— me that ain't walked right for ten years? I've got all over sech desires."

"Wait till you have tried it," Janice cried as she touched the self-starter and the engine began to purr again.

"Now, ain't that mighty nice, Mother?" they heard Cross Moore say to the fretful woman. "To go spinning about the old roads around Polktown would do you good."

"Oh, you got more uses for your money, Cross Moore, than flitterin' it away on sech things. If you spent money as careless as them Days does,—look at the hole Jase Day is into right now—*you'd* be 'Owin'' Moore, 'stead o' Cross Moore."

"Do you know," Lottie said to Janice as they drove on, "I think Miz' Cross Moore would be lots happier if—maybe—she had an echo."

"An echo?"

"Yes," the child said, nodding her head. "Like me. You know, *I* should have been awfully lonesome, and maybe as short-tempered as she is, if I couldn't have talked to my echo."

"Why?" Janice asked curiously, for the philosophy of the little girl interested her.

"Why," Lottie said, still speaking seriously, "my echo was worse off than I was. Yes it was. It couldn't get away from where it was—not even to fly across the cove—unless I told it to. It had to stay right there in the pine woods on Pine Point. But even while I was blind I could find my way about."

"Very true," agreed Janice, likewise serious. "The echo is a poor little prisoner."

"So it is! so it is!" laughed Lottie gayly, for

these queer little imaginings and fancies were part of her very nature. Then she grew grave once more. "You 'member how I went to look for it that time, and it snowed so hard, and Mr. Nelson Haley came to find me? He found me, but I never did find out just where that echo lived. I was 'most afraid it had gone for good, but it was there yet the last time I was down here."

While she was speaking the car ran down to the shore of Pine Cove at a beautiful but rather retired spot with an old fish-house and disused wharf in the foreground and, across the placid pool, the sheltering arm of Pine Point, thickly grown with tall pines. Against the wall of the pine wood Lottie's voice echoed back to her with almost uncanny distinctness as she stood in her old place on the wharf.

"He-a! he-a! he-a!" she shouted shrilly and sweetly; and back to her came the prompt echo:

"'E-a! 'e-a! 'e-a!"

"See! he's there yet," she cried, turning to Janice. "Come up here, Janice, and see if he'll answer you. Mr. Haley says there are echoes everywhere; but I don't believe there is a single one as nice as mine."

Janice came, laughing. "What shall I say to your friend?" she asked.

"Oh! you must not call what I do, of course. You shout somebody's name—somebody you love," the child advised.

Instantly Janice opened her lips and expelled toward the wooded point: "Nelson!"

"'Elson!" shot back the echo.

"Of course," cried Lottie, dancing up and down in her satisfaction. "He knows Mr. Haley. But shout somebody's name he doesn't know."

"Here comes Mr. Thomas Drew's sloop, Lottie," Janice said as the big sailing vessel on which she had several times sailed on fishing excursions shot into the cove before a favoring wind.

"Oh! how pretty!" cried the little girl. "And what a big sail. He's going to drop anchor where he usually does—see!"

The sloop swept majestically between the old wharf and the pine wood where the echo "lived."

"Now, Janice!" urged Lottie, "shout again. Call a name my echo doesn't know."

And Janice, still smiling, cried aloud:

"Daddy! Daddy!"

No repetition of the call came back from the wall of pine wood. Lottie seized her friend's hand almost in fear.

"Oh! he doesn't answer! He doesn't know your father, Janice Day." Then, awestruck, she put a question that stabbed Janice to the quick: "Do—do you suppose anything real *bad* has happened to your father 'way down there in Mexico?"

Afterwards, Janice realized that the big sail of the sloop, flattened as it crossed between the wharf and

the distant wood, had caught her voice and held it, echoless. Nevertheless the odd occurrence engendered in her heart a fear of impending peril. She began to worry again about Broxton Day. She counted the days that must elapse before she could possibly hear from her father in reply to the letter she had written about her Uncle Jason's difficulties.

The Day homestead on Hillside Avenue no longer housed a happy and contented family. It grew very difficult for Janice, even, to be cheerful. And Marty positively seemed to have lost his whistle. Janice tried her best to don a sprightly air; but she observed her uncle and aunt and Marty sometimes whispering together and watching her; and this made her feel uncomfortable.

"Daddy" usually wrote his beloved daughter a weekly letter. Sometimes it was delayed a day or so because the ore train was delayed out of Alderdice to San Cristoval. So, when the expected letter did not arrive with the maximum of speed Janice was patient.

"I just won't let that old echo foolishness get on my nerves," she told herself firmly. "I am not superstitious—I won't be!"

It was hard to raise the spirits of the family; but the greater the effort she put forth to that end the more she, herself, was helped. She could not really understand what kept those about her so downhearted. The bank people seemed willing to give

Uncle Jason all the leeway possible in settling the affairs of the absconded Tom Hotchkiss. Janice had no idea her relatives were hiding a secret from her, and all of them felt it the very hardest task they had ever undertaken.

Of course, in the general news from Mexico Mr. Day's plight caused little comment in the daily press. Mexican troubles had continued for so long that the American public considered it an old story. Mr. Day was only one of hundreds of courageous Americans who felt as though they must stay by their business in the embattled country, despite Washington's warning to them to get out of the danger zone.

And now, it seemed, Janice's father had paid the toll for heeding his own venturesome spirit. All the information Nelson, Mr. Middler, and Uncle Jason had been able to gather from all sources pointed to the truth of the first report of the situation in the Companos District.

Mr. Day was wounded; and so sorely that his escaping laborers could not take him away from the mine when they were driven forth by the insurrectos. This was the final news Janice's friends had obtained from the Border, and now they did not know what to do next. Successfully keeping the story of her father's peril from the girl was not enough. How to reach and bring Mr. Day out of Mexico was a problem that balked Janice's friends.

Indeed, even to communicate with the wounded man was impossible. It was reported that, although San Cristoval had been retaken by the troops of the de facto government of Mexico, the Alderdice and other mines in the Companos District were in the hands of the rebel party.

Janice began to miss Nelson Haley's frequent calls. He had been coming to the Day house several evenings during the week of late; and although he offered the perfectly sound excuse of extra school work, the girl missed him. To tell the truth Nelson shrank from being in Janice's company. He had turned coward! Although he was the first to suggest keeping Mr. Broxton Day's peril secret from his daughter, now Nelson feared all the time that in some way the truth would come to the surface. The conspirators walked upon a volcano that might at any moment break out and overwhelm them. And what would Janice do or say, when this eruption occurred? That query troubled the schoolmaster a great deal.

Naturally of a perfectly frank nature, the situation was bound to irk his mind ceaselessly. Marty and his parents feared a sudden revelation of the truth, too; so that every knock on the kitchen door during an evening gave each of the three a sharp and distinct shock.

One evening Marty heard somebody drive into the yard after supper and he ran hurriedly to open the

porch door. He was always expecting to have to head off some person not in the secret who would appear with the news of Mr. Broxton Day's state.

"Who is it, Marty?" shrilled his equally anxious mother at the crack of the door.

"Hi tunket!" ejaculated the boy, "'tlooks like —why, it is! It's Elder Concannon. What's he want here?"

"Never you mind. Go out and hitch his horse in the shelter, and tell him to come right in," ordered Aunt 'Mira. "Dear me! where's your manners, Marty Day?"

"Well, *he's* safe enough," muttered Marty, starting for the shed.

CHAPTER VIII

LOTTIE SEEKS A FRIEND

ELDER CONCANNON came in apparently in a cheerful mood. He was not a frequent caller at the Day house; he never had been, indeed. But he liked to play a game of checkers with Janice, whom he considered quite a scientific player for a young person.

"I drove around by Brother Middler's on an errand—church business," explained the elder; "but he wasn't at home. Gone over to Bowling to marry a couple."

"Who air they?" asked Aunt 'Mira, at once interested.

"Every married woman is deeply int'rested in ev'ry other woman's marriage," Uncle Jason declared. "Havin' got one poor man inter captivity she's hopin' all her sisters'll have as good luck. Who *is* the poor feller that's got to do penance for his sins, Elder?"

"I don't see but you are both equally int'rested, Brother Day," chuckled the elder. "It's Sam Holder and Susie Pickberry."

"Another of them Pickberry gals gittin' merried, eh?" ejaculated Aunt 'Mira.

"Well, there are a lot of them to get married," the elder said. "All the Pickberrys had big families."

"And none of 'em much good," growled Uncle Jason.

"That may be," agreed the elder. "It does seem as though 'bout the only command in the Scriptures that any of 'em knew, was that one about 'increase and multiply and fill the earth.' And they are given to marrying young," pursued the elder reflectively. "This Sue is a bouncing big gal; but she's barely sixteen year old."

"Hardly sixteen!" exclaimed Janice.

"Cricky!" was Marty's comment, he having come in after blanketing the elder's colt. "You're getting to be an old maid, Janice, 'cordin' to that. You'd better stir about and look yourself up a husband 'fore they put you on the shelf."

Janice looked into his freckled face reflectively. "I've sometimes thought it was too bad they won't let first cousins marry, Marty," she said.

"They do, Janice, except in a few of the States," observed Elder Concannon, looking at the girl until she blushed as rosily as had Marty.

As the laugh at this subsided, the elder went on:

"Those Pickberrys are intermarried so that they don't know the degrees of cousin any more. Why, this Susie's father and mother was closly related. I remember, for I married them."

"I suppose," put in Aunt 'Mira, "Mr. Middler must make quite a bit out o' his merriage fees. He's been havin' a string of 'em lately."

The elder fairly snorted and his beard seemed to bristle.

"That's the way with all you folks," he said, plain disgust in his tone. "Because a minister don't work with his hands you say he must make his livin' easy. And you calculate him makin' from five to twenty dollars ev'ry time a bridal couple raps on his door. Huh! I've had the groom borrow money of me before he got out o' the house."

Marty giggled. "That girl certain sure got a hot one, then. If he'd got the girl without money, I should think he'd calculated to keep her without money."

Elder Concannon was laughing reflectively.

"Do you remember old Deacon Blodgett, Jason?"

"Huh?" grunted Mr. Day. "Not very well. But I remember his darter—she't taught the school here. I went to school to her myself for a while. And a right *se*-vere old maid she was."

"Yes. Beulah Blodgett was severe," agreed the elder, his eyes still twinkling.

"She used to wallop the boys somethin' awful," added Uncle Jason, rubbing his horny palm on his trouser leg and then looking at it as though the sting of Miss Blodgett's ruler had not even at this late day entirely departed from his memory.

"I remember," agreed the elder. "Not many ever got the start of Beulah Blodgett."

"Only Cale Hotchkiss." Uncle Jason halted in his speech and a positive grimace of pain seized upon his features for the moment. "Oh, well! Caleb wasn't like his son turned out to be, ye know," he muttered.

"True enough," said the elder, with sympathy in his tone.

"Speakin' of Cale and Miss Blodgett," Mr. Day hurried to add, "you know Cale was a great feller for rhyming—makin' po'try, you know. Why, he had lots o' pieces printed in the 'Poet's Corner' of the Middletown *Courier*. Mostly about folks that had died, you know.

"Howsomever, Cale got cotched once in school writin' po'try. Miss Blodgett come up behind him, looked over his shoulder, and had him out 'on the line' purty prompt. She told him school was no place for sech as that. She had a fierce eye an' a arm like a blacksmith," Uncle Jason continued. "She'd stand on the aidge of her platform and how she *would* bring down her ruler on a feller's hand! Whew!

"Well, this pertic'lar time she says to Cale Hotchkiss: 'You're sech a smartie at makin' up rhymes, make one now b'fore I hit ye. Hold out your hand!' And by ginger!" chuckled Uncle Jason, "he done it."

"What did he say, Dad?" asked Marty, eager for the particulars of any mischief.

"Cale sings out:

"'Here I stand before Miss Blodgett;
She's goin' to strike an' I'm goin' to dodge it!'"

The elder joined in the laughter over this old joke quite as heartily as anybody; but he had not forgotten his own story that had been side-tracked by Uncle Jason's reminiscence.

"Her father, Deacon Hiram Blodgett, was my senior deacon when I first came to Polktown Church," Elder Concannon said. "He was a good man and a just. But like most folks outside the ministry he depreciated the work performed by the pastor of a church like this one at Polktown, considering that 'he made his money easy.'

"I—I had a growing family then, and increasing expenses," said the elder, with a little flutter in his voice that was something Janice had never heard before, and she looked at him with amazement. Elder Concannon was not at all given to timidity; but there seemed right here a hesitation in his manner and in his voice.

"Well, anyhow," he began again, "I thought I needed an increase in my salary of a hundred dollars a year and I talked to Deacon Blodgett about it. He hemmed and hawed. He hated to give up

church money just as he hated to give up his own, if he could save it.

"He put up the same claim as Mrs. Day did just now, regarding marriage fees. I allow I had more marriages to perform and traveled farther and got less for them than any minister who ever came into these mountains," and the elder smiled grimly. "However, the deacon got quite warm about it.

"'I tell you,' he says to me, 'even if they don't amount but to two dollars a ceremony, you've made this year over and above your salary agreed upon, the hundred dollars you claim to need.'

"It made me angry. It r'iled me in a most worldly way, I do allow," sighed the elder. "I guess the old Adam was roused in me. I had this Jim Pickberry and 'Mandy Whipple to marry that very night and I knew about what sort of folks they were.

"'Deacon Bloodgett,' I said, 'will you give me two dollars for my next marriage fee?'

"'Surely I will,' says he, for he was always on the lookout for a shrewd bargain.

"'Then you'd better drive me over to Bowling to-night to the wedding and I'll give you whatever I get—sight unseen.' He agreed," chuckled the elder, "never thinking that I didn't have a horse and would have had to pay a dollar for the hire of one to get to my appointment.

"Folks don't live so poor now in this neighbor-

hood—not even the Pickberrys. The house we went to was mostly log cabin, built back in Revolutionary times, with newer additions built on from time to time to accommodate a growing family.

"Jim Pickberry was a great, raw-boned, black-haired, and bearded giant of a man, and he was more than half drunk before he stood up with the girl. He wore his work clothes—all he had, it's probable—flannel shirt, shoddy trousers, and high boots. He did take off his hat. And 'Mandy was in a clean gingham; but she was barefooted, it being warm weather.

"There was a crowd there—they oozed out into the yard and looked in through the big room windows where I married the couple, hard and fast. When the ceremony was over and everybody had kissed the bride, Jim took me aside.

"I knew what was coming," said the elder, his eyes twinkling again. "I had already had experience enough to know the symptoms.

"'Parson,' Jim said to me, 'I'm awful much obliged to you for coming 'way over here and splicin' me and 'Mandy. It's mighty nice of ye. I expect it's sort o' customary to pay ye somethin' for your trouble?'

"'Yes,' I said. '"The servant is worthy of his hire," Jim.'

"He hemmed and hawed a bit and finally he blurts out: 'Parson! I ain't got airy a penny. Ye

know how 'tis—the licker an' the stuff to eat cleaned me out. But I got a mighty likely litter of pups out in the barn. Come out and take your pick, will you?'

"'No; let Deacon Blodgett do that,' I told him. 'He wants a dog,' and I collected my two dollars from the sorest man who ever passed the contribution plate," concluded the elder amid the hilarity of his listeners.

The caller indicated a desire to speak with Uncle Jason in private before he departed, and the two men went out of doors to unblanket the colt and discuss the subject the elder had come to talk about.

Later Janice learned that the old gentleman had come for the express purpose of offering Mr. Day financial assistance in straightening out the tangle of Tom Hotchkiss' affairs. Elder Concannon would take up the first note of a thousand dollars, which was almost due, and would accept Uncle Jason's signature for the debt without security. It was a friendly thing and the show of kindness on the elder's part delighted Janice as much as it surprised her relatives.

On this evening, however, and while Uncle Jason was at the stable with Elder Concannon, Janice and Marty had something else to think about. It was Marty who spied the flitting figure down by the lane gate as he looked out of the kitchen door after the departing elder and Uncle Jason.

"Hi tunket!" he drawled. "What's that, I want to know? 'Tisn't a dog—nor a calf. Something's got strayed, sure enough, and don't know whether to venture in here or not."

"What is it, Marty?" Janice asked idly, following him to the door.

The boy grabbed his cap without replying and ran toward the gate. When Janice came out upon the porch the figure had disappeared behind the bole of one of the great trees down by the fence. Marty's coming frightened it out of the shadow in a moment and they saw it going up the road.

"Hey, there! Stop!" Marty called. "It's only me—Marty Day. I won't hurt you."

He could run twice as fast as his quarry, and in a minute had the shaking, weeping figure by the arm.

"Hi tunket!" he gasped. "Lottie Drugg! What you doin' over here?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" sobbed the girl. "I want Janice. Take me to my Janice Day. Oh! do, Marty!"

"Sure," he told her. "There! there! don't cry no more. Were you lost? What brought you here, Lottie?"

"I—I can't tell you," she wailed. "I'll tell my Janice—I'll tell her."

"Come on, then," said Marty huskily. "Janice is just yonder. Don't you see her on the porch?"

He led the sobbing child into the yard of the Day

house and Janice, hearing them coming, ran out to learn what it meant.

"Lottie!" she cried, amazed.

Lottie Drugg ran into the bigger girl's arms. "Oh, Janice! My Janice Day!" she sobbed. "*You'll* take me in, won't you? You'll let me live with you? *You love me just the same, don't you?*"

"Goodness! What's the matter with the child?" gasped Janice.

"You got me," her cousin said gruffly. "I dunno what it's all about."

"Does your father know where you are, Lottie? Or Mamma 'Rill?"

Lottie's weeping became more abandoned.

"They don't care nothing more about me. They're not going to want me any more pretty soon. No, they're not! If—if you won't—won't have me, Janice Day, I sha'n't have a—a place in this—this world to go to."

CHAPTER IX

MRS. SCATTERGOOD TALKS

"WHAT do you suppose is the matter with Lottie?" murmured Marty. "Is she sick or something?"

Suddenly Janice Day suspected the truth. She hugged little Lottie all the tighter, saying in reply to her cousin:

"Don't bother her now, Marty. She isn't sick, I'm sure. She'll be all right in a little while. She's come over here to spend the night with me, haven't you, Lottie?"

"Ye—yes! If you'll k-k-keep me."

"Sure we'll keep you," said Marty gruffly. He was much moved by the little girl's tears. "You stop her from gulpin' that way, Janice. She'll—she'll swallow her palate!"

"She's in no danger, Marty," the older girl said. "She's just sobbing."

Lottie's tempestuous sobs began to subside. Janice led her toward the kitchen door, whispering: "Is there anything the matter with papa or Mamma 'Rill? Tell me, Lottie."

"Just that they ain't going to want me any more," repeated Lottie.

"Has Mrs. Scattergood been talking to you?" whispered Janice.

The visitor nodded emphatically but said nothing more. Janice turned to Marty, and the boy wondered why she looked so angry. He had not done anything out of the way, he was sure.

"Run right across town to the store, Marty, and tell Mr. Drugg and his wife where she is. Tell them she is going to stay all night with me. But don't tell them anything else."

"Huh?" queried Marty.

"Not a thing. Just that she came here to stay all night with me and I didn't want them to be worried. That's enough."

"Oh!" grunted Marty. "I see," and he started out of the yard immediately, while Janice led the more-quietly-sobbing Lottie into the house.

"Dear sakes alive!" exploded Aunt 'Mira, "what ever is Lottie Drugg doin' 'way over here at this time o' night? Anythin' wrong with 'Rill?"

"Not a thing," Janice said cheerfully. "Lottie wanted to stay all night with me and she is a little late getting here. Now hush, honey! don't cry any more. You are here now and you'll be all right, you know."

"Why, do tell!" said wondering Aunt 'Mira. "What's she cryin' for? Didn't she know that

little gals was as welcome here as the flowers in spring? Come, give Miz' Day a kiss, sweetheart. I'm sartain sure glad to see ye."

Lottie began to feel better and swallowed her sobs—if not her palate—very quickly. She was of some importance in *this* house, at least. She sat down and took off her tam-o'-shanter and unbuttoned the new blue coat of which she had been so proud only a few days before. But she was no longer wearing "Mamma 'Rill's" present—the string of blue beads.

"It's airly yet," said Mrs. Day. "When's your usual bedtime, Lottie? We can all have a game of parchesi or somethin'. Can't we, Janice?"

"I don't go to bed much before half-past nine. Sometimes I'm let to stay up later," Lottie said.

"And your eyes are as bright as buttons now," said Aunt 'Mira comfortably. "Jest wipe the tears out of 'em."

"That is right, Lottie. Marty will soon be back and we'll play games," Janice agreed.

Lottie removed her coat and began to feel decidedly better. Marty came in after a while, red in the face and short of breath, but cheerfully a-grin again. He gave a bundle to Janice and winked at her as he said:

"All right. I ran all the way. They say she can stay. Whew!"

"It's my nightie," whispered Lottie, pointing to

the bundle. "And my toothbrush and clean stockings, and things."

"Some day you'll bust something, runnin' so," said Mrs. Day to Marty. "Where are all those picture puzzles and toy-games? You want to amuse Lottie now she's here."

Nothing loath, the boy rummaged out a wealth of amusement-producing inventions and Lottie forgot her sorrow for the time being. Mr. Day came in, and, being instructed by Janice in the kitchen, made no comment upon Lottie Drugg's presence.

The visitor sat close beside Marty and if, at any time, she did not play to the best advantage, he corrected her privately. As for Mr. and Mrs. Day they looked on and smiled. Who could help smiling at little Lottie Drugg?

Janice was glad that her visitor's mind was coaxed away from her troubles before bedtime. By that time Lottie was chattering like a squirrel and she bade the family good-night happily.

After the two girls had said their prayers and got into bed, the visitor suddenly seized Janice tightly around the neck and sobbed a little with her face pressed close against the bigger girl's shoulder.

"Oh, Janice Day! I never *can* go home to papa and Mamma 'Rill. What shall I do?"

"Don't worry about that, honey," Janice told her soothingly. "You can stay here, you know, if you wish to."

"Oh, yes! I love you. Mr. and Mrs. Day are awfully nice to me. And Marty is just the *best* boy. But—but it isn't going to be like home," she wailed.

"Well then, dear, why don't you wish to go home any more?" asked her friend soberly.

"They—they don't want me. They—they ain't going to want me at all."

"Who says so?"

"I—I know they don't. Why, Janice Day! they've asked God for another little girl—a baby girl—to come and stay with them. Mrs. Scattergood says so. That's what she meant by saying my nose was going to be put out of joint. She told me so. I asked her," confessed Lottie.

"Oh, my dear!" sighed Janice.

It was difficult to seek to relieve Lottie's mind regarding the wonderful thing that was coming to pass in the Drugg household, without saying what might be unkind, but true, about Mrs. Scattergood. Just at this moment Janice felt that she could have shaken the acid-tempered old woman with the greatest satisfaction!

"Did you ask Papa Drugg or Mamma 'Rill about it?" Janice queried of the little girl.

"Oh, no."

"Then how do you *know* they don't want you any more?"

"Why—of course they don't. Or they wu—

wu—wouldn't *ask* for another little girl," sobbed Lottie.

"Perhaps the baby will be a little boy, honey. When folks ask God for a baby He sends what He thinks is best for them to have. And wouldn't you just *love* to have a little baby brother to love and play with and help take care of? Now, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, Janice Day!"

"Just think! You'd always have somebody to play with at home and you wouldn't be lonely any more. You wouldn't even mind if your echo went away," suggested Janice. "Think of it! When he grows bigger——"

"He'll be like Marty!" gasped Lottie, clutching at her friend more vigorously.

"That is, if it *is* a boy. But if it is a dear little girl, she'll be lots of company for you," Janice pursued. "Think how nice it would be to have a sister. I've always wished I had one. She can play keep house with you, and play dolls, and you both can dress up and be real grown-up ladies, and——"

A long, contented sigh from little Lottie. She began to breathe regularly, with only now and then a sob in her voice. She was asleep.

Janice, however, did not sleep at once. With the soft, warm body of the innocent child in her arms she lay a long time pondering these things.

How unkind of Mrs. Scattergood to let the barb

of her bitter tongue sting Lottie's gentle heart! How wrong and unwise 'Rill's mother was about most things!

Because she selfishly desired her daughter to be at her beck and call, Mrs. Scattergood had opposed her marriage to Hopewell Drugg. So, at every turn, where the sour old creature could do so, she sowed thorns in the path of her daughter and Hopewell.

"She makes herself unhappy, and all about her, as well. She succeeded in embittering poor 'Rill's life for several weeks with her untrue gossip about Mr. Drugg's drinking. Now, when she should be her daughter's greatest stay and comfort, she deliberately tries to set poor little Lottie against her own mamma and father. It is dreadful," Janice decided. "It must be stopped. *I've got to do something about it!*"

So, when she finally dropped to sleep it was with this decision firm in her mind. She awoke with it, too, and after leaving Lottie at the schoolhouse, Janice drove her car around by Mrs. Scattergood's little dwelling at the crown of the High Street hill.

The birdlike little old woman was out in her front yard swathing her rosebushes in straw and mulching their roots against the harder frosts of winter which were already due. She waved a gloved hand to the young girl who stepped out from behind the steering wheel of her car and entered the creaking gate.

"Here ye be, Janice Day, jest as bright as a new penny," said Mrs. Scattergood. "I wanter know if that young'un of Hopewell Drugg's was over to your house last night."

"Yes, she was, Mrs. Scattergood," Janice gravely replied. "She remained all night with me."

"Huh, I don't approve of sech didoes. My young'uns was allus in the house by dark—and stayed in till mornin'. 'Rill came traipsin' over here after eight o'clock to see if I'd seen her."

"Lottie was all right," said Janice. "I sent Marty over to tell 'Rill not to worry."

"The young'un ain't more'n ha'f witted. I allus have said so."

"She is just as bright as any other child of her age—brighter than some," affirmed Janice warmly. "She is more sensitive than most. Therefore we should be careful what we say to her."

"Ha! what d'ye mean, Janice Day?" asked the old woman, eyeing her caller suspiciously and belligerently.

Janice told her. She spoke warmly and with flashing eyes that held Mrs. Scattergood silent for the nonce. She had never seen Janice display any appearance of wrath before, and if her pet cat had suddenly turned in her lap and spit at her and scratched her, Mrs. Scattergood would have been no more surprised.

"Hoity-toity, young lady!" she finally said.

"Do you think this is pretty talk to me that's old enough to be your grandmother?"

"That is just why I am saying it to you, Mrs. Scattergood," Janice responded firmly. "You *are* little Lottie's grandmother——"

"No, I ain't!" snapped the woman, her face very grim. "Nor I ain't likely to adopt any young one of Hope Drugg's and Cindy Stone's. I—should—say—not!"

"And is that the attitude you propose to assume when the little stranger comes? You cannot deny your relationship then."

"Oh! Well! Ahem! That's quite another matter," said Mrs. Scattergood crossly.

"Just now, when dear 'Rill needs all the kindness that can be shown her—by everybody—why can't you forget your "—"spite" she desired to say, but did not—"dislike of Hopewell and little Lottie? Be friends with them. Why! this arrival should make you all one happy family together."

Mrs. Scattergood snorted—literally. "Ha! Sech a great to-do about nothin'," she ejaculated.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Scattergood. It's not about nothing. It's the greatest thing that can happen. It is the most beautiful thing in the world to 'Rill. I know she feels that way."

"Poor critter! She's almost as big a fule as that young'un, Lottie," muttered the woman.

"Doesn't she need your love and comfort all the

more, then?" suggested Janice softly. "Think of it, Mrs. Scattergood."

"I'll tell ye what I *do* think, Janice Day," snapped the other, not at all pacified. "I think you'd be in better business if you found something else to do, 'stead o' comin' here to tell *me* what's my duty."

"Oh, now, Mrs. Scattergood, don't be angry with me. I know you'll be sorry later if you do not show the love that 'Rill has the right to expect from you at this time. Don't make trouble for her."

"Humph!" ejaculated the old woman, scowling at her. "A body might think you had trouble enough of your own so't you could afford to mind your own business."

Janice flushed, for the criticism stung. She had, however, determined not to take offense at anything Mrs. Scattergood might say. Nothing but the girl's deep sense of the necessity for her act had urged her to address 'Rill's mother in this way.

"I haven't any personal trouble just now, Mrs. Scattergood. Of course, Uncle Jason's difficulty worries me a bit. But when daddy hears about it he will help."

"Your father! Broxton Day! Humph!" exploded the old woman, her wrinkled face flushed and her eyes snapping. "I calc'late Broxton Day has got *his* hands full right now without doin' anythin' for your Uncle Jase."

"Why, what do you mean, Mrs. Scattergood?"

The color washed out of Janice's cheeks instantly, and her lips remained parted in her excitement. Somehow the tart old woman's speech struck deep into the girl's heart.

For several days she had been fighting down the feeling of suspicion and fear that was rising like a tide within her. Daddy's letter was delayed. She had not chanced to see any newspaper but the *Courier* of late. Why! even Uncle Jason's *Ledger* had not appeared on the sitting room table. She watched the hard old face of the crotchety Mrs. Scattergood in a fascination of growing horror, repeating:

"What do you mean? Has anything happened to daddy? And you know it—and I don't?"

"Well, ye oughter if ye don't," snapped Mrs. Scattergood. "I never did believe in hidin' the trewth from folks. No good comes of it."

"What *is* it? What has happened to my father?" and Janice clutched at her arm.

"Wal, I've gone so fur, I might's well tell ye," the woman said, all of a flutter now. "*Somebody* oughter tell ye. Ye was bound to find it out, anyway."

"But what is it?"

"Broxton Day's been shot by them Mexicaners. He's shot, is a prisoner, an' I hear tell he ain't never likely to git out o' that plaguey country alive!"

CHAPTER X

THE ONLY SERIOUS THING

The gate clashed open again just as Janice's weakened grasp slipped from Mrs. Scattergood's arm and she staggered away from the excited, panting old woman. The girl would have fallen, save that the young man who rushed in at the gate, having seen the danger in season, caught her in his arms.

The girl's eyelids fluttered; her lips remained open; the pallor of her face was terrifying.

"What's happened?" demanded the newcomer. "What have you done to her, Mrs. Scattergood?"

"Me? I ain't done nothing—not a thing!" denied the woman shrilly.

"You said something to her, then?"

"Wal! What if I did? She'd oughter hev been told before."

"*You told her?*"

"Daddy! Oh, Daddy!" moaned Janice.

"You mind your own business, Frank Bowman! You're one o' them foolish folk, too, that's allus tryin' ter hide the trewth 'cause it's bitter. Sure 'tis bitter; 'twas meant ter be. An' these namby-pamby

people in this world that can't stand the trewth to be told to 'em——"

Mrs. Scattergood overlooked the plain fact that the reason she had lost her temper and told this secret to Janice Day was because the girl had told her a few truths. But Frank Bowman was not listening to the old woman's tirade. Janice had not lost consciousness. Only for a moment did she sag helplessly on the young civil engineer's arm.

Then he led her out at the gate and to her car. He aided Janice into the seat, but slipped behind the steering wheel himself and touched the self-starter.

Mrs. Scattergood stared after them, slowly retreating the while toward the house. Her face did not display its customary smirk of complacency. That bit of gossip that had trembled on the tip of her tongue for days, and which she had been begged not to reveal to Janice, had at length been spoken. Her mind should have been relieved; but Mrs. Scattergood was not satisfied. There was something wrong. All she could see as she stumbled into the house was the stricken face of the young girl who had so often done her a friendly kindness, whose smile had been, after all, a cheering sight to her aging vision, whose whole existence here in Polktown seemed to be for the express purpose of making other people happy. It was with a sort of mental shock that Mrs. Scattergood suddenly discovered

she, too, had been blessed and comforted by the spirit of Janice Day.

The car swept up the hill and over its crown, as the old woman retired into her cottage. Frank Bowman had not said a word. He twisted the steering wheel a trifle and they shot around the Town House front and into the Upper Middletown road.

"Oh, Frank! Is it true? It *is* true!" the girl finally faltered.

"Yes. Your father is wounded. We do not know how badly. No news has come out of the district since the first report. He is a prisoner of the insurrectos at the mine."

"There has been another battle?"

"Yes. Another uprising against the government. It's an awful thing——"

"Is there no hope? Oh, Frank! there must be!"

"Of course there is hope," he cried. "He's no worse off than he has been several times before."

"But you say he is shot!"

"Well—yes. That is the report."

"If one part of the report is true, why not the other?" said the girl, her keenness of wit thus displayed.

"But the wound may not be bad. We don't know that it is. Oh! hang that old woman, anyway! Why did she tell you?"

"Because she was angry with me," sighed Janice.

"Well——"

"And you must all think father very badly hurt or you would not have hid it from me—for how long?"

He told her. "But we don't really know anything about it. Nelson is raising heaven and earth for news. There is a good deal of excitement along the Border, they say——"

"Yes. I read that. Oh! how have you all managed to hide it from me for so long? I felt—Oh, you had no right!"

"We did what we hoped was for the best," Frank said gently.

"Oh, I suppose you did. But daddy wounded! I must go to him, Frank."

"Oh no, my dear girl. That would not be possible. Nobody can get beyond San Cristoval, and no American is allowed to cross the Border. It is not safe to enter Mexico now on any pretext. Those greasers hate us worse than poison."

Janice tried to control herself. She had not wept; this dry-eyed suffering was a deal worse for the girl, however, than would have been a passion of tears.

"Where—where are you taking me?" she asked suddenly, laying her hand on Frank's arm.

"Why, weren't you on your way to the seminary?"

"But I can't go there now," she said. "Not to-day."

"Here's Elder Concannon's place, right ahead. We can turn there if you like."

At the moment the elder himself appeared from one of the barns, and seeing the car and recognizing its occupants he came out to the great gate to hail them.

"Aren't going right by without stopping, are ye?" he said genially.

Frank Bowman quite involuntarily brought the car to a stop. The moment he did so the elder saw Janice's face.

"What's the matter?" he asked quickly. "Has she been told? Does she know?"

Frank nodded and the old man quickly came around to the girl's side.

"My dear," he said huskily. "My dear, brave girl! You've got something to trouble you now for a fac'. It's the waiting to hear news—to get the exact fac's—that is going to be hardest. Your friends have saved you some of that."

"Oh, I know! I know they thought they were doing it for the best," wailed Janice. "But daddy! He needs me!"

"It may not be anywhere near so bad as it might be, or as you think it is," Frank put in.

"Quite true—quite true," said the elder very gently for him. "I know just how hard 'tis to wait, Janice. I calculate those that wait at home suffer more than those that actually see battle, murder,

and sudden death. But your father, Janice, may be already on his way home. You can't tell. You got to have patience."

"But I ought to go to him, Elder Concannon," she said.

"Not to be thought of! Not to be thought of!" he repeated. "What? A gal like you going clear down there to Mexico? Preposterous!"

That is what Uncle Jason said later, when his niece broached the subject to him. Indeed, Janice found nobody would listen to her or agree to such a project. A girl to go down to the Border, especially in these uncertain times? They scoffed at her!

It was said that the parties of rebels and commandoes of the Mexican army were hovering along the Rio Grande, ready to swoop like hawks upon unprotected Americans. The thin line of United States soldiers was strung along the desert country, watchfully waiting, policing the district as best they could. But they could not protect Americans who went over the line.

That evening an informal council of war was held in the Day sitting room. Frank Bowman was there as well as Nelson Haley. Frank was a very busy young man, for the branch railroad was completed, and, having built it, he was to act as supervisor of the branch until the directors decided upon another incumbent for the office. Besides, Frank had a

deep interest in the pretty daughter of Vice President Harrison of the V. C. Road, and therefore he was not seen about Polktown so often in his free hours as formerly. He had come this evening, however, with Nelson, and the two young men, as well as the older heads, were unalterably opposed to Janice Day's desire to attempt going to the Border.

"Why, you couldn't get across the Rio Grande," Frank said decisively. "Trains are not running with any degree of regularity on any road in Northern Mexico. The International is at a standstill, I am told—tracks torn up in places and the American engineers chased out. And this San Cristoval place is on a branch of the International."

Nelson asked a question about the best route to be followed in getting to that point on the Border opposite to San Cristoval, and Frank told them, clearly and concisely.

"But even then you are several hundred miles from the Companos District," he pursued. "Chihuahua is a big state. Texas itself is only to be compared to it for size. A ranching country, slopes up to the Sierras. It is in the foothills of the Sierras that the Alderdice Mine is situated. Why, Janice! you are actually just as near to your father—at least news of him—here in Polktown as you would be down there on the Border, for there all wires and other lines of communication are cut. There is

no safe way of getting beyond the Rio Grande at the present time."

"Jefers-pelters!" ejaculated Walky Dexter, who was present at the conference. "Broxton Day might's well be in Chiny."

"You are right, Walky, for once," declared Uncle Jason. "I wish he'd never gone down to that heathenish country."

Aunt 'Mira was in tears—had been so since Janice had driven home in her car with the civil engineer that morning. She had controlled herself after a fashion, these several days for Janice's sake; now she was making up for lost time, so Marty declared, and wept with abandon.

"Why, she *can't* go down there inter Mexico," wailed the woman. "No gal like her can't. 'Tain't *fit*. Why, them women down there don't even wear decent clo'es! I've seen pitchers of 'em with nothin' on but basket-work stuff around their waists an' anklets. It's disgraceful!"

"Oh, cricky, Ma!" chortled Marty. "You are gittin' things mixed for sure. That's the Hawaiian Islands you're thinkin' of. Hula-hula girls. Oh my!"

"Wal, 'tis jest as bad in Mexico, I haven't a doubt," said the fleshy woman, tossing her head. "'Tis no place for a decent gal like our Janice."

"Ye air jest as right as rain, Miz' Day," agreed Walky.

"Hi tunket!" said the boy, the only person who did not attempt to discourage Janice in her thought of starting at once for the Border. "Hi tunket! wouldn't it be *dandy* to go down there among those greasers and bring Uncle Brocky home? I'd go with you, Janice, in a minute!"

"Huh!" gruffly said his father, "you'd be a lot of use, you would."

"I bet I would be, so now!" said the boy. "If Janice goes, I'm going. Ain't I got some interest in Uncle Brocky, I'd like to know?"

"You show your int'rest in this sittin' room fire, son," observed Mr. Day. "Go out and get an armful of chunks. Fire's goin' out on us."

"That's all right," growled Marty. "If Janice goes, *I'm* goin'—that's all there is about it."

But nobody considered for a moment that Janice could, should, or would go! It seemed positively ridiculous to the minds of all her friends that the girl should even contemplate such a thing.

"But what *shall* I do?" she cried.

"Wait. That's all any of us can do, Janice," Nelson said tenderly. "It is terrible to be inactive at such a time, I know. But you could do nothing down there on the Border that you cannot do here in Polktown."

"I'd be nearer to daddy," she said, with a sob.

"Ye don't know *that*," put in Uncle Jason. "We don't none of us know where Broxton Day is right

now. Why! he might open that door yonder and walk in here any moment. How d'we know?"

But Janice found little comfort in the thought. Indeed, she scarcely heard what her uncle said. She could think of little but her father's perilous situation, wounded and a prisoner among people whom she believed to be as bloodthirsty as savages.

Uncle Jason's financial difficulties were nothing to compare to this. Little Lottie Drugg's state of mind slipped entirely out of Janice Day's memory.

The only serious thing in the world to her now was her father's peril and her inability to get to him to lend him the comfort of her presence.

CHAPTER XI

"I MUST GO!"

JANICE awoke after a very uneasy and depressing night with the phrase "I must go" written so plainly upon the mirror of her mind that it might as well have appeared across the pretty wall paper at the foot of the bed.

"I must go!"

No matter what other people said—no matter what they thought. At this juncture the young girl was fain to believe her own wisdom superior to that of all her friends.

Of course, daddy had sent her here to be in Uncle Jason's care. She was really supposed to be under his domination. If Uncle Jason said "No!" Janice was presumed to obey, just as Marty had to obey.

And Uncle Jason had uttered his refusal quite distinctly. He could not see the need for Janice to go to the Border when not a thing was yet known regarding Broxton Day's situation save that he was wounded and was held prisoner far beyond the lines of the Mexican army.

"Why, Janice," he told her at the breakfast

table, "I ain't got any money to spare jest now, for a fac', as ye well know; but if I thought for a minute 'twould do your father a mite o' good, I'd take what I have and go down there myself to look for him. Sartain sure I would!"

"You jest trust to your uncle, Janice," said Aunt 'Mira, once more on the verge of tears. "He knows best; don't ye doubt it."

Janice did doubt it. She did not wish to say so, but no matter what her friends said, or how wise they might be in other matters, the girl's intuition told her that beyond peradventure there was something for her to do for her father if once she could get to Mexico.

She saw it was of no use to talk about it, however positive she might be that she was right. She could not convince Uncle Jason and Aunt 'Mira. Indeed, she could not even change Nelson Haley's opinion. Everybody seemed to think it was an unheard-of idea for a girl to go alone on such a journey for any reason.

Janice had traveled East alone to Polktown when she was only a young girl, and nobody, save Mrs. Scattergood, criticized that fact. It was because there seemed to be danger threatening along the Border—the possibility of actual war between the United States and Mexico—that they all considered her desire so extraordinary.

To Uncle Jason, too, in his personal difficulties

over the Tom Hotchkiss notes, the money for such a trip as Janice wished to make seemed a big item. It was, of course; that truth the girl admitted. It was a big item for her to contemplate. Although the bank at Greenboro sent her aunt each month a check to cover Janice's board there was no hope of the girl's getting other money from that source. The board matter was an agreement Mr. Broxton Day had entered into with the bank before he went to Mexico. Janice did not really understand how her father stood financially with the Greenboro bank. She did not know whether or not he had money on deposit there. His recent profits from the mine she actually knew nothing about. He was always liberal with her regarding spending money when he had any money at all. She had never asked him for a penny, for that was unnecessary.

Just now her funds chanced to be very low. Some repairs on the Kremlin car had been necessary; and then there was her fall outfit which had just been paid for.

Janice counted her loose cash and looked up her bank balance. The latter was down to fifty dollars; she had not much more than ten dollars in her pocketbook.

She could not ask Uncle Jason for money. Nor Nelson. She could depend upon nobody to help her in this emergency, for they were all against her.

Those words were ever before her mental vision;

"I must go!" Determination grew hourly in her heart. No matter what others thought or said her duty lay far off there to the southwest—over the Border in battle-ridden Mexico!

Her main trouble was the fact that she must keep her intention secret from her friends—from those whom she loved and who loved her. Janice's nature was naturally the opposite to secretive and this course was particularly distasteful to her.

She had, however, come to that point where she must decide for herself, and she refused to be influenced by her advisers. Had their objections been based upon anything better than a feeling and belief that the Border "was no place for a girl," Janice would have hesitated to follow her determination, so opposed to the consensus of Polktown opinion. But she felt that her friends failed to see the matter in the right light.

Daddy was wounded—a prisoner—perhaps dying! He needed her! It seemed to the troubled, anxious girl as though his dear voice, so well remembered, rang continually in her ears. He called for her!

She could not tell her friends this. They would not understand it—not even Nelson. Janice felt that although the schoolmaster sympathized with her in every fiber of his being, he was bound by his very love for her to oppose her desire in this matter.

He of course could not go with her to Mexico. Uncle Jason would not if he could. Who else was there to take the lead in such a venture?

"Why," thought Janice Day, "I've just got to go, and go alone! That's all there is to it. And the less I say about it before I'm ready to start the better."

She thought she saw a way to her end—a financial way, at least. She had offered to sell her car to aid Uncle Jason in his trouble. She would sell it now for funds with which to make her determined journey, for Uncle Jason did not need her proffered assistance at present, while her father's need was much the greater.

Every hour that passed increased Janice's anxiety. What if daddy died down there in Mexico—all alone among strangers, without ever seeing his daughter again?

This thought was too dreadful for Janice to mention aloud to anybody. It was in her mind continually; she could not escape it.

That very day—the one following her discovery through Mrs. Scattergood of the truth about Broxton Day as known to so many Polktown folk—Janice set about carrying out her plan. She drove around to Mr. Cross Moore's instead of going directly to Middletown and the seminary.

There had been a time not so very long before when Janice and the president of the town selectmen

had been at variance. Mr. Cross Moore had desired the Polktown hotel to retain its liquor license while the girl had championed the dry cause. The latter had won; but Cross Moore was a good loser. Mrs. Moore might be angry with Janice Day; but her husband had always held what he termed "a sneaking fondness for that Day girl" and no matter how much they might conflict in politics or opinion, the man respected Janice's earnestness and appreciated her unselfishness.

Coming down the hilly street, guiding her car skillfully around the "hubbly" places, Janice saw Mrs. Beaseley out sweeping the narrow brick walk laid in front of her gate. The tall and solemn-looking woman, still dressed in mourning for the husband dead now many years, and whose memory she worshiped, gave the girl a frosty smile, although Janice knew there was an exceedingly warm heart behind it.

"You air late going to school, Janice Day," she said. "Mr. Haley went an hour ago."

"I am not going to the seminary this morning," the girl replied, stopping her car. "Everything is all right with you, I suppose, Mrs. Beaseley?"

"Oh, yes," the widow said, sighing mournfully. "I have my health, and should be thankful for't I s'pose. My sainted Charles useter say that health was ev'rything in this world—an' 'twas to *him*. When he lost his health he lost all his zest for livin'.

He had allus been a robust man up to his sickness. He was a heavy feeder and as long as he eat his victuals with guster I felt he was all right.

"Now, Mr. Haley, he ain't never jest suited me regardin' eatin'. It does seem as though a young man like him should put away more victuals than he does."

"Well, I'm sure he never gets up from your table hungry, dear Mrs. Beaseley," laughed Janice. "And some of the doctors say that one should do that to insure a long life."

"What! go hungry?" gasped this scandalized housewife.

"Not eating quite all we think we want at each meal," explained Janice.

"Wal! for the good Land o' Goshen! I hev said —an' I stick to it—that doctors is given more nowadays to change in styles an' fashions than what silly women air—even that Bowman gal that cut up such didoes in Polktown last winter.

"Fust they believe in stuffin' a body; then it's the fashion ter starve folks. One doctor says meat victuals is the only fit eatin' for human bein's an' the next one wants you should put on a nosebag an' eat horse feed. Humph! Reminds me of silly George Putnam and his pig."

"What about them, Mrs. Beaseley?" asked Janice, who was always amused by the widow's speeches.

"Why, George had a right likely shote give to him one year, but it turned out a runt, he fed it so queer. The critter seemed allus squealin' for something to eat, an' my Charles asked him:

"'George, how d'you feed that critter?'

"'Why,' says silly George, 'I kalkerlate ter feed him ev'ry other day.'

"'Ye do?' says Charles. 'What's that for? Don't you suppose the pig gits hungry jest as often as *you* do?'

"'Ye-es—that may be,' says George. 'But I like my side-meat 'ith a streak o' lean an' a streak o' fat.'

"Why, goo' mornin', Mr. Cross Moore! How's your lady this mornin'?" concluded the widow as the selectman, whom Janice had seen coming up the hill, stopped beside the car.

"She's 'bout the same, Miz' Beaseley. Morning, Janice! Which way you going?"

"I am going your way, Mr. Moore," the girl said with a sudden feeling of timidity. "I—I was coming to see you."

"Well, turn right around and drive up toward—well, toward Concannon's—and you can see me all you want to. I don't want mother should see me drivin' off with you in this car," and he chuckled. "She thinks she's taken a gre't dislike to this sort o' locomotion; but I'm going to have a car of some kind, jest the same."

Janice made no reply until she had turned the

automobile and was headed uptown. Then her first words were:

"Mr. Moore, I want you to buy *this* car."

"Ahem! you mean one like it—a Kremlin?" he said, eyeing her curiously.

"No. This very car. It's all right and I will sell it to you cheap."

"You goin' to get a new one, Janice?"

"Oh, Mr. Moore! I'm not thinking of motor cars. I'm in great trouble. Perhaps you know? My father——"

"I heard something down to Massey's drugstore about his being hived up somewhere in Mexico by them insurrectionists," replied Cross Moore, still watching her countenance.

"Well, I want to go to him. You know how Uncle Jason is fixed just now."

"Yes, Janice. Jase is in a hole."

"So you see, I've *got* to sell my car."

"Mebbe I could git the money for you—ye can borry it of me," suggested the selectman.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Moore! That's more than kind. But I wouldn't know when or how I could pay you back. And Uncle Jase can't possibly help me—if he would. I am going to tell you frankly, Mr. Moore, the folks don't approve of my going down there to find father."

"No? Wal, it's not to be wondered at."

"But, don't you see? I've just *got* to go, Mr.

Moore. And I must sell my car to get the money to pay my fare. You can have it for——" she pondered and then mentioned a sum that she thought was a bargain price indeed, even for a car that had been run as far as this Kremlin. "You can have it for that—and for one other thing."

"Huh? A string to it?" he demanded.

"Your silence is involved. You must not tell anybody you have bought the car till I get out of town. I am going to run away, Mr. Moore, and you must help me if you wish to own this automobile."

CHAPTER XII

NELSON DOES NOT UNDERSTAND

JANICE came back from Middletown with several bundles. She had been shopping, she told Aunt 'Mira; but she did not mention the fact that she had drawn her last fifty dollars from the bank.

Mr. Cross Moore had been to the bank, too; and the sum of money which he had drawn out in crisp twenty and fifty dollar bills was pinned securely to Janice's underwaist.

She merely told the folks that Mr. Moore was going to take his wife out in the car, for he had already learned to run an automobile, it seemed. And if the president of the town selectmen could not license himself to drive a motor car, who could?

Janice's uncle and aunt made no comment; they had other things to think about. If Marty suspected anything he kept his suspicions to himself.

All of course watched the papers for news of Broxton Day; but Mexican news seemed very tame indeed. Those Americans who came out of Chihuahua told dreadful stories; but most of these tales

had to be taken with "more than a grain of salt." Many of these "Americans" owned to Spanish-Mexican names, and were merely Americans by naturalization—and that "for business purposes only."

Their tales dealt with the recent uprising in the Companos District; but nothing new was related about what had happened at the mines north of San Cristoval. No mention was made in any dispatches regarding Mr. Broxton Day. Letters to Nelson Haley in reply to his inquiries, both from Washington and the Border, merely said that matters were in such a chaotic state in Chihuahua that no facts were available.

It was on the evening of this eventful day—the day she had sold her car—that Janice went to speak privately with Nelson. Knowing that her uncle would absolutely forbid her departure for the Border if she told him she was going, Janice would not open any discussion with him. She had already written a note to leave for her Uncle Jason and Aunt 'Mira to read after she was gone. But with Nelson it was different. How could she go away from Polktown without telling the young schoolmaster she was going—without sharing with him this secret that now had begun to weigh so heavily on her mind?

She stopped at Hopewell Drugg's for a minute and found the little family in almost a holiday spirit

—the storekeeper bustling about waiting on customers, 'Rill at her sewing table, and little Lottie singing over the supper dishes.

"You did the child a world of good, it seems," the storekeeper's wife said softly, to her friend. "Since she spent the night with you, Lottie has been like another girl."

"Don't let her drift away from you again, honey," Janice said, smiling tenderly on the little woman. "Remember, Lottie must have just as deep an interest in this wonderful happening as any of you."

"I—I don't know just how to talk to her," 'Rill whispered, flushing a little.

"You don't have to talk," smiled Janice. "Just *love* her—that is all you need do. You *do* love her, and don't let anybody tell her differently."

There was a lamp burning in Nelson Haley's study, and Janice tapped lightly on the window pane, bringing him to the front door. She did not wish to run the gantlet of Mrs. Beaseley's volubility on this occasion.

"My dear!" said the schoolmaster, drawing her within and seeing her very serious face. "Nothing new has happened?"

"About daddy?" she sighed. "Nothing that I am aware of. I know nothing, Nelson. But I feel that I *must* know very soon. This uncertainty is killing me!"

"My dear girl," he murmured. "I wish I could help you."

"But you can't," she broke in with energy. "Nobody can. I must help myself now, for you and the others have done all you could."

"Why, Janice, what more can you do than we have attempted?" he asked wonderingly. "The moment any news comes over the Border of your father it will be telegraphed North."

"And do you think I can wait here—inactive, hopeless—for something to turn up? Why, Nelson! there is nobody down there with any special interest in daddy. The men who are engaged in the mining enterprise with him are all in the North here."

"Yes, yes," Nelson cried. "But what can be done? What can *I* do? What can any of us do, my dear Janice?"

"I don't know that anybody can do anything—up here. But I mean to go down there—yes, I do! I am going to find my father, Nelson."

She began to sob hysterically and the schoolmaster patted her hand with soothing intent. "Of course you can't do that, Janice. A girl like you could do nothing down there in Mexico."

"How do you know?" she demanded, dashing away her tears and looking up at him. "I tell you, Nelson, I am going."

He sighed and shook his head. "Of course you

can't do that, Janice," he repeated. "I thought that was all settled last evening."

"It was perhaps settled in your mind; not in mine."

"It would be an unheard-of thing to do. Your uncle and aunt would never allow it."

"Yes, Nelson, I know that. But I will go just the same," the girl told him.

He shook his head again and smiled at her. "You have the will to do it, I don't doubt, Janice. But, really, you couldn't."

Janice opened her lips once more; then she closed them. What was the use of saying anything further? Even Nelson did not believe she would carry out her intention.

"Very well, then," she said, rising and making ready for departure. "I'll say good-bye. You can't see it my way, Nelson; but if it were *you* who were wounded and alone down there in Mexico do you suppose any power on earth would keep me from going to you?"

She slipped away before the full force of her final speech percolated to the young schoolmaster's brain. He got up to follow her; then he paced the floor of his study instead.

"Of course, she doesn't really mean it," he finally told himself, and went back to the correction of the pile of compositions on his table.

It was quite true. Nobody believed she meant it

except Mr. Cross Moore. And the selectman had perhaps a higher opinion of Janice Day's ability than most people in Polktown. We respect a person who was got the best of us in any event, and Mr. Moore had reason for considering this young girl to be the principal person involved in his recent defeat in town politics.

At another time Janice might have been somewhat piqued by the apparent fact that nobody believed she could or would start for Mexico. She had thought her reputation in Polktown for determination and the carrying out of anything she undertook to be such that her friends would believe that, when she said a thing, she meant it. She had been a *do something* girl since first she had come to this Vermont village to live. They might have been warned by past events of what to expect of Janice Day when once she had made up her mind.

She had already packed her bag. It made her unhappy to do this secretly and to sit with the family during the evening without saying a word regarding her plans.

Walky Dexter looked in for a little while; but he was unable for once to raise the general temperature of the social spirit. As for Marty, Janice caught him several times looking at her so strangely that she feared he suspected something. Walky noted the boy's strange mood, for he finally drawled:

"Jefers-pelters, Marty! what's ailin' on ye? Ye

look like Peleg Swift did arter he eat the three black crows."

"Huh! that old wheeze!" growled Marty. "He didn't eat no three crows. He only ate something they said was burned as black as a crow. One o' his wife's biscuit, I bet."

"He, he! Mebbe you're right," chuckled Walky.

"I reckon on givin' Marty a good dose of jalap," said his mother. "I was thinkin' for sev'ral days he was lookin' right peaked."

"There!" fairly yelled Marty to Mr. Dexter. "See what you got me in for? You are about as much use as the last button on a rattlesnake's tail, you are!"

But Marty dodged the unwelcome, old-fashioned remedy that night. He slipped away early—presumably to bed. Janice was not long in going to her room; but she did not lie down to sleep. When the house was dead-still, all save the mice in the walls and the solemn ticking of the hall clock, the girl arose and dressed for departure.

The *Constance Colfax* made her trip down the lake in the morning, halting for freight and for any chance passengers at the Polktown dock at six o'clock. The steamer got into Popham Landing before ten o'clock, in time for the morning train to Albany.

Janice was ready for departure long before it was time to leave the house. At this time of year it was

quite dark at half-past five. When she crept out with her bag the frost was crisp under foot.

The steamboat was whistling mournfully for the landing. She saw nobody astir on Hillside Avenue, but when she reached High Street two drummers were leaving the Lake View Inn with their sample cases. There seemed nobody else going to the steamboat dock; Janice drew her veil closer and hurried on.

Walky Dexter did not make an appearance. She had heard him say the evening before that all the freight and express matter was already at the dock and that he could sleep late for once.

Indeed, it seemed as though everything worked in Janice Day's favor. There was nobody abroad to see her, or to object to her departure.

At home, when the family arose, they would not at first think her absence from the kitchen strange. Aunt 'Mira would say: "Oh! let her sleep a while if she will."

Janice could hear the tones of her aunt's voice, and her eyelids stung suddenly with unbidden tears.

Later they would go to her room to call her and find the note to Uncle Jason she had left pinned to the cushion on her bureau.

CHAPTER XIII

MARTY EXPANDS

We are prone to judge other people from our inner secret knowledge of self. When we say we think another person would do a certain thing, we usually base our opinion upon what we would be tempted to do under like circumstances.

Thus it was that Marty Day knew in his heart exactly what his Cousin Janice was about to attempt. Why, to use his own effulgent expression, "there was nothing to it!" Of course she would seize the first opportunity that opened to go to the Border in search of Uncle Brocky.

Would he not do the same thing himself if his father were captured and wounded by the Mexicans? "A fellow would have to be a regular hard-boiled egg to dodge his duty when his father was in such trouble," the boy told himself; and in Marty's opinion Janice Day was a "regular fellow."

He listened to all the objections raised by the older folks just as Janice did. And they made about the same impression on him that they did upon his cousin. Indeed, he was somewhat angered by the way Nelson Haley and Frank Bowman joined in this

advice with the others against the idea of Janice going to the Border.

"But, shucks!" thought the lad. "They *had* to talk that way. That comes of being really grown up. Right down in their hearts you bet Nelse Haley and Frank Bowman are only sorry they can't go down there themselves to hunt for Uncle Brocky."

Perhaps Marty was not so far from the truth in this surmise. Nelson and Frank were in the early years of their manhood. There was something very attractive in the idea of starting out on such a mission as Janice planned.

Marty did not hint to his cousin that he suspected her intention. But he followed her on that busy day—followed every move she made. He was sure she had sold her car to Cross Moore. Marty had a friend in Middletown to whom he telephoned and through whom he learned that both Janice and Mr. Moore had been seen in the National Bank.

He immediately borrowed Frank Bowman's motorcycle and hurried over to Middletown before the banks closed. As his father had said, Mrs. Day had deposited a "nest-egg" for Marty in the savings bank and had given him the book. The boy proceeded to draw out the money on his account to the very last cent of interest.

"Hi tunket!" he thought as he whizzed back toward Polktown. "It ain't much; but it'll help *some*.

"Mebbe dad and ma may need me and my money a lot; but Janice is going to need me first—of course she is. She can't go clear 'way down there to Mexico *alone*." Which shows that Marty shared the general masculine feeling that, being "only a girl," Janice could not really carry out her intention. "She's got to have a man along whether she thinks she needs one or not. And, hi tunket! I'm going to be *it*."

Marty, however, was not altogether visionary. He had made it his business to find out about what it would cost to get to the Border, and he realized he must have money for other expenses besides his car fare.

On returning the motorcycle to the civil engineer he took his courage in both hands and said:

"Mr. Bowman, would you do me a great favor?"

"I think so, Marty. What is it?" returned Frank, smiling into the freckled, perspiring face of the boy. "Want to borrow my dress suit or a hundred dollars?"

"The hundred dollars," Marty told him gaspingly.

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, sir; I do. And I can't tell you what I want it for, nor for how long I'm going to need it. But I'll pay it back."

"Marty," said his friend, "I've got only seventy-five dollars handy. Will that do?"

"It'll haf to."

"Do you mean it?" demanded the good-natured engineer. "Do you really mean you need it?"

"Yes, sir! I need it all right, all right. And I don't want you should ask me what for. And I don't want you should tell anybody."

At another time Frank Bowman might have hesitated. But knowing the trouble Mr. Day was in over the Hotchkiss notes, he suspected Marty was bent on helping his father with some needed sum of money. He took out his notecase and handed the seventy-five dollars to Marty in banknotes.

"You're a good fellow, Mr. Bowman," the boy cried.

"So are you," responded the engineer, smiling into the lad's eyes.

"'Tisn't everybody would trust me like this."

"'Tisn't everybody who knows you as well as I do, Marty. If you get stuck and can't pay me back right away, I'll let you work it out when the V. C. branch gets to running."

That was talking "man to man" and Marty's chest swelled.

"You won't be sorry for this," he assured Frank Bowman, and hurried home to supper.

So he had the money safely fastened in his inside vest pocket while he watched his cousin so oddly during the evening. When she was helping Aunt 'Mira with the dishes Marty slipped into Janice's

room. He found her traveling bag in the bottom of her closet, packed as he suspected.

"Hi tunket! isn't she a plucky girl?" Marty told himself. "I'm just proud to be her cousin, so I am! We'll have some time down there among the greasers, believe me!"

Marty owned a shotgun and he was tempted to take it along. But he thought better of that. He could not very well hide it while traveling on the train.

"B'sides I reckon rifles, or these here automatics, are more fashionable down there on the Border," the boy ruminated.

Bedtime came and he, like Janice, was too excited to sleep. He was afraid he might sleep, however, and, knowing his failing, he determined to arrange matters so that he could not possibly miss the boat in the morning.

Putting a pair of clean socks and an extra handkerchief in one jacket pocket, and a clean collar in another (for Marty believed in traveling light), he climbed out over the shed roof before midnight and carefully descended to the ground by the grape arbor route. Making his way to the wharf he curled up on some bags in front of the freight-house door. Nobody could unlock and open that door without disturbing him; but the chill morning air awoke him in plenty of season.

When the steamboat bumped into the dock Marty

was right at hand to catch the bow hawser. It was still dark and he slipped aboard without being noticed.

The *Constance Colfax* boasted no staterooms; but the few all-night passengers from up the lake were sprawled about the unventilated cabin in a somnolent state. Marty only peeped in at them, and then ensconced himself on deck where he could watch the gangplank.

He saw his cousin in her heavy veil come aboard. She, too, preferred to remain on deck, cold as it was, to going into the stuffy cabin. Janice was warmly dressed and the morning was clear. When the *Constance Colfax* got under way again she watched the few twinkling lights of Polktown and the stars overhead fade out as the sky grew rosy above the mountain tops.

The boat was well out of the cove when the sun came up. A brisk wind whipped up the whitecaps. Sheltered in the lee of the little deckhouse, Janice was left to herself and to her thoughts save when the purser came around for her fare.

"Didn't take on no crowd at Polktown, Miss," he observed genially. "Only you and three more."

Janice had noticed only the two traveling salesmen; but she made no comment. She did not suppose she was in the least interested in that fourth passenger whom she had not seen.

At last they reached the Landing. The railroad

here was only a branch line and the cars were old-fashioned and uncomfortable. She could get no good accommodations to Albany she well knew, so she bought a ticket only as far as that city.

Had she intended going south and west by way of New York she would have been obliged to make some arrangement to get over to Middletown to take the train there. This might have caused comment. Besides, from what Frank Bowman had said, she believed she could save both time and money by taking the Great Lakes route.

There were three day coaches in the little train already made up at the Landing. Janice chose a seat in the middle coach without any idea that somebody in whom she would have been very much interested stole into the rear car before the train started.

Marty dared not go to the ticket office, for fear his cousin might look out of the car-window and see him. But he was quite sure Janice was bound for Albany first, and he paid his fare to that point when the conducter came through.

It was a tiring ride, with stops at "everybody's barnyard gate," and the coaches filled up and were half emptied again two or three times during the journey. Janice had made no preparation for luncheon and once when the train halted at a junction "ten minutes for refreshments" as the brake-

man bawled it out, she could find nothing in the bare and dirty lunchroom fit to eat or drink.

When she returned, hopeless and hungry, to her seat there was a neatly wrapped shoebox lying on the dusty plush cushion.

"Why! whose is this?" she involuntarily asked aloud.

"Isn't it for you, my dear?" asked a woman who occupied the seat directly behind hers and to whom Janice had already spoken.

The girl picked up the package and read scrawled upon it in an entirely unfamiliar handwriting: "Miss Janice Day."

"Oh! it has my name on it," Janice admitted. "But I don't know a thing about it." She was rather frightened. Somebody had recognized her. Somebody knew she had run away and must be watching and following her. "Who—who put it here?" she asked the woman in the next seat.

"Why, you are actually pale, child!" laughed the matron, who had her own well filled lunch basket open in her lap. "You don't suppose it is an infernal machine? It looks like a box of lunch to me."

"Yes, I know," said Janice faintly. "But I can't imagine who could have left it here for me. It has my name on it."

"A brakeman left it," explained the woman. "Leastwise it was a man with a railroad cap on.

Open it. I should not question the goods the gods provide. You found nothing fit to eat in that station, I am sure."

The train was already moving on. Janice sat down and opened the package. There was first of all a thermos bottle filled with hot tea. There were ham sandwiches—more satisfying as to thickness than delicacy, perhaps—a slab of plum cake and several solid looking doughnuts with a piece of creamy cheese.

It was more like a workman's lunch than one put up to tempt the appetite of a traveler; but Janice was hungry and she finally ate every crumb of it.

She examined the thermos bottle very carefully, searching for some mark upon it that might reveal the identity of the owner. Why! she could not even return the bottle, and it must have cost almost a dollar. She remembered that Marty had sent off to a catalog house for one like this and it had cost him eighty-five cents.

After she had eaten the hearty luncheon she went back and spoke to the brakeman. But he denied knowing anything about the package or having placed it in her seat. The forward brakeman made a similar statement. She even asked the conductor about it with the same result.

"I certainly would not worry about it, my dear," the comfortable matron behind Janice said. "Some

friend of yours has played a joke upon you—and a very kind joke, I call it."

"Yes. But *who?*" murmured Janice Day, feeling much worried indeed.

"Somebody got aboard at that station to deliver the box and you were out of your seat——"

"But how did he know it was my seat?" demanded Janice.

"Saw you through the window as the train stopped," suggested the friendly woman. "Of course, I only *thought* it was the brakeman who brought it. I did not really pay attention."

This explanation did not go far enough to relieve Janice's mind. She could not imagine who had planned the surprise. Nobody, she felt sure, knew she was leaving Polktown but Mr. Cross Moore. And surely *he* would not do a thoughtful thing like this.

It was a mystery bound to trouble her a great deal. She did not know who might bob up before her at almost any place and try to make her go back to her uncle and aunt.

The girl was determined to withstand this demand, no matter who made it. If Uncle Jason himself had followed her Janice Day was sure she should keep right on in her intent. Or Nelson——

"It can't be Nelson. He couldn't leave his school for even a day," the girl thought. "And he surely did not believe I meant to go when I saw him last

evening, or he would not have taken what I said so coolly. Who could it be?"

Not for a moment did Janice suspect the truth. She had no idea that a familiar, boyish figure sat in a rear seat of the rear coach, his hat pulled well down over his eyes, eating from a box of lunch similar to that she had found in her seat. That is, lacking nothing but the bottle of tea. Marty owned only one thermos bottle. He had wheedled the cook on board the *Constance Colfax* to put up the two lunches for him; but he washed his own down with water from the tank at the end of the car.

Marty was already beginning what he considered to be his necessary oversight of Janice on this journey. He was quite sure a girl who did not think of lunch was not fit to travel alone!

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLACK-EYED WOMAN

The train arrived at Albany about dusk. Janice, disturbed by the incident of the mysterious lunch, half expected to be met by a telegram ordering her to return to Polktown. Or perhaps something worse and harder to cope with. But she told herself that not even a uniformed policeman should make her return! She was secretly very glad to be able to get out of the station without being involved in any difficulty of this kind.

She had studied the time-tables and knew which train to take out of Albany. Realizing the long and tedious journey before her, she concluded that it would be the part of wisdom to secure berth reservation right through to El Paso.

Whether or no she should remain on the train as far as that Border city, Janice did not at this time decide. She knew that direct communication with San Cristoval and the Alderdice Mine lay through the desert country below El Paso, and she must be guided a good deal by what she learned en route. Her father had an army friend at Fort Hancock. She might stop off there to make inquiries.

However, she bought her ticket with berth coupons to El Paso, and then went to dinner. She had two hours to wait for the Chicago express, a reservation on which her special ticket called for.

She had no idea, did Janice, just how much trouble and worry of mind she was causing a certain boy who had trailed her from one railroad station to the other with much care that she should not observe his presence. When Marty sidled up to the ticket window after Janice was gone and asked for a ticket to "just where that girl bought hers for," the agent certainly did stare at him.

"What's all this for?" he asked Marty suspiciously. "Are you following that young lady?"

"Naw," said Marty gruffly. "I'm goin' with her."

"Oh! you are? Who says so?"

"I do," the boy declared. "D'you think I'm goin' to let her go clear 'way down there to Mexico alone looking for her father?"

"Hi!" exclaimed the man, growing interested, there being no other person waiting at the moment. "Who are *you?*"

"Say! you keep it to yourself, will you?" urged Marty anxiously. "I'm her cousin. What'll a ticket cost just like hers? Her dad's been wounded down there in Mexico and she thinks she can go there alone and bring him back. I can't let her do that, can I?"

"Hasn't she any other folks?" asked the ticket seller doubtfully.

"Her dad's all she's got," Marty declared. "But I'm going to see her through."

Well, it was not the ticket seller's business. He named the sum it would cost Marty to go on that special train.

"Hi tunket! I don't want to *buy* the train," gasped the boy. "I only want to ride on it."

"Special ticket on this train to Chicago. And berth all the way through to El Paso. I can give you a cheaper rate on another train, however, my son."

"But I got to be on the same train as her to look out for her," observed Marty. "Hi tunket! berth clear through, heh? I'll have to sleep day an' night to get my money's worth."

"It's the best I can do for you."

Marty groaned, but paid like a man. It made a dreadful hole in his capital. He ate his dinner in a lunchroom through the window of which he could watch the exit of the restaurant to which his cousin had gone for her evening meal.

"Take it from me girls don't have no idea about spending money," Marty groaned, swallowing the last mouthful of a ten cent plate of beef stew as he saw Janice leave the restaurant. "The sign on that window over there says: 'Dinner seventy-five cents.' Hi tunket! How can anybody eat seventy-five cents

worth of victuals to once't? I never knew Janice had *that* capacity."

Marty had insisted upon being given a reservation in another car from that in which Janice was to ride. He was glad to note when the long train rolled in that his was a rear car. Janice would ride next to the dining car.

The boy had no use for the dining car or buffet. He had supplied himself with a box of cheap lunch. If his cousin had money "to throw to the birdies," as Marty privately expressed it, not so the son of Mr. Jason Day of Polktown! After all he had said about his father being a "tight-wad" Marty found that it positively hurt to spend more for a thing than he believed it was worth.

He made sure that Janice with her bag boarded the train. He was one of the last to get on himself, thus making sure that nothing had happened to cause his cousin to alight again.

But Janice, relieved because she had seen nobody from Polktown, found herself very pleasantly situated in her car. Nobody had interfered with her in any way. The lunch given her on the train to Albany was a most mysterious thing; but whoever had given it to her seemed not desirous of halting her determined course.

Janice had secured an upper berth; but she did not mind that. She found that the woman who was to occupy the one beneath was already on the train.

She was a black-eyed, dark, rather Oriental-looking person, and Janice thought her quite handsome in a majestic way. And she possessed an engaging smile.

"You are traveling alone, my dear—yes?" the woman asked her with an intonation distinctly foreign. "All the way to Chicago?"

"And beyond," Janice said pleasantly.

"Ach! You American girls are wonderfully independent—yes? Friends will meet you at your journey's end?"

"No. I expect nobody to meet me," Janice told her quite sadly. She did not care to take the woman into her complete confidence, although she seemed to be a very pleasant person.

The black-eyed woman lent her a magazine during the evening, as the train rumbled on across New York State. She was friendly, but not too pressing in her attentions and certainly Janice was unsuspicious.

At nine o'clock the porter began to arrange the berths. Janice went to the ladies' room and found the foreign-looking woman there. As the girl, in her dressing-sack which she had taken out of her bag, combed out her hair, the sharp, black eyes of her fellow-passenger spied something.

"You carry something valuable there?" she said, touching lightly with her finger the packet of banknotes the girl had pinned to the bosom of her waist.

"And with only a common pin? Ach! that is unsafe, my dear."

Janice had folded the bills in a silk handkerchief; but of course the woman could feel just what the crisp notes were.

"I think they will be all right," the girl said, shrinking a little from the woman's touch, yet without feeling any real fear of her or of her intentions.

"See!" the other said as though wishing only to be helpful. "I haf a big safety pin here in my bag—see? We will use *it* to fasten your packet—soh. Iss that not much better?"

Janice could only thank her and smile. Really one could not take offense at such a kind act nor be suspicious of so kindly a person.

Having lost her previous night's sleep it was not strange that Janice should sleep soundly, even on this rushing train. Occasionally she aroused to the knowledge of the wheels clattering over switches, or hollowly roaring as the train crossed a long trestle. The night sped—and the train with it. She was far, far away from Polktown when she awoke.

Again her berth mate was before her in the dressing room. "Iss your money still safe, my dear?" the black-eyed woman asked.

"Oh, yes," laughed Janice, "I am not at all afraid of losing it."

"You are so different. Me, I am always feeling to see if my jewel-bag iss safe. Oh, yes!"

Janice, having no jewels, was not much interested; though it seemed odd that the black-eyed woman should have her mind so fixed on robbery.

Before the train reached Chicago the woman had made herself very friendly with Janice. The latter refrained from telling her new acquaintance just why she was going to the Southwest, and alone, save that she expected to find her father there and that she was anxious about him.

"You will remain over a day in Chicago to rest?" queried the woman. "You haf friends there—yes?"

"Oh, no. We are going to arrive in good time. I know the schedule perfectly," Janice assured her. "I shall go right on."

It was not until then that the black-eyed woman revealed the fact that she, too, was going on beyond Chicago. It seemed odd to Janice that her fellow-traveler should not before have acknowledged that Chicago was not her destination, still she gave the matter little thought. She did not tell her name to the girl. Indeed, Janice did not reveal her own name during their conversation.

The woman asked Janice very particularly about the route over which the girl was to travel and then, consulting an ivory-bound memorandum book she carried, in which Janice could not help seeing the

notes were written in some foreign language, the woman murmured.

"Ach, yes! It iss so. My dear, I can be your fellow-passenger for many hundred miles farther. Ach! such a great country as it iss. I shall see about having my routing changed at once. We may travel together yet a far way. And we are such goot friends."

Janice felt somewhat abashed at this claim. She enjoyed the black-eyed woman's conversation; but she was not strongly drawn toward her. If they were such "goot friends" the feeling of friendship must be mostly on Madam's side.

For it was as "Madam" that Janice knew the woman. It seemed to fit, and she seemed to expect its use. She was a very interesting person, the girl thought, and naturally she was curious about the black-eyed woman.

There was an hour's wait at Chicago, and when Janice and her acquaintance left the train together it was to enter a dense throng in the train-shed.

"Be careful, my dear," whispered Janice's companion warningly. "Keep your coat buttoned across your chest. No knowing—pickpockets always in big crowds are—yes."

Janice was inclined to smile; but as her companion walked closely upon one side of her she felt herself being shouldered roughly on the other hand.

She turned sharply and with an exclamation. Her

coat was torn open by some means. Janice wore a loose-fitting blouse and it was not easy to be certain that a hand was at her bosom.

"Look! that boy!" hissed Madam in the girl's ear. "Such a shrewd-faced rascal. Ach! I believe he tried to rob you."

Janice, clutching quickly at her blouse over the packet of banknotes, knew her money was safe. She only saw the back of the boy to whom Madam referred.

"Why!" Janice Day murmured. "He isn't a bit bigger than Marty. Do—do you really think he tried to rob me, Madam?"

"Sure of it!" announced her companion with emphasis. "Ach, yes! We know so little about those we meet in a crowd, my dear."

CHAPTER XV

A SHOCK TO POLKTOWN

MARTY DAY, who was neither a prophet nor a person of much moment in his native town, was, of all Janice's friends, the only one who really believed the girl would put her desire into action.

To tell the truth, even Cross Moore, who had bought Janice's automobile and who held the original bill of sale of the car, upon the possession of which he had insisted, scarcely believed the girl would get out of town without being halted by her uncle.

Nelson Haley did not suppose for a "single solitary moment" that Janice meant what she said when she bade him good-bye in his study. The next day he went to school without an idea that Janice was already on her way to the Border. He missed Marty Day, but did not think there was anything significant in the boy's absence.

School was over for the day and Nelson was leaving the building, bidding good-day to Bennie Thread, the janitor, when Walky Dexter drove through the side street, urging Josephus in a most disgraceful way.

"Git up, there, ye pernicious pest!" Walky

shouted to his old horse, thrashing him with the wornout whip he carried and which never, by any possibility, could hurt the rawboned animal. "*Gidap!* Jefers-pelters, Schoolmaster! is thet you?" he suddenly demanded, seeing Nelson. Josephus stopped immediately. He well knew Walky's conversational tone. "Hev ye heard about it?" sputtered the expressman.

"Heard what?" asked Nelson calmly. "Sure you are not overexerting yourself? Your face is very red, Walky. Perspiration at this time of year——"

"Oh, you go fish!" exclaimed Walky. "Mr. Haley! I got suthin' ter tell ye. I kin see well enough ye ain't wise to it."

"Walky," said the young schoolmaster solemnly, "there are really a lot of things in this life that I am not wise to, as you call it, and I doubt if I shall ever understand them all."

"Oh! is that so?" retorted Walky Dexter. "Wal, I'll perceed ter wise ye up to one thing right now. Ain't ye missed Marty to-day?"

"Marty Day?"

"Yep. That's the young scalawag."

"He has been absent from school—yes."

"Oh! he has? D'ye know where he's gone to?"

"Why, no."

"And neither does nobody else," declared the expressman excitedly. "Unless he's gone off with

Janice—an' she never said a thing about *him,* I understand."

The expressman's word's amazed Nelson quite as much as Walky could have wished.

"What *are* you talking about? What do you mean by saying Janice has gone away?"

"Jefers-pelters!" ejaculated Walky. "Ain't you hearn a thing about it?"

"No."

"Wal then, you better lift a laig an' git up to the ol' Day house," Walky observed. "If ye ever seen a stir-about ye'll see one there. I dunno but ol' Jase'll hev a fit an' step in it. And as for Miz' Day, she's jest erbout dissolved in tears by now, as the feller said. An', believe me! if she *does* dissolve there'll purt' nigh be a deluge on this hillside, an' no mistake!"

Before he had finished and clucked to the sleeping Josephus, Nelson Haley had reached the corner of Hillside Avenue and was striding up the ascent to the Day house. He saw several people come to their front doors, and he knew they would have hailed him had he given them a chance. Everybody seemed to be aware of this startling happening but himself.

He went into the kitchen of the Day house without knocking. His gaze fell upon the ample Mrs. Day weaving to and fro in her rocking chair, her apron to her eyes, while Uncle Jason was sitting dejectedly in his chair upon the other side of the

stove, with his dead pipe clutched fast between his teeth.

"Mr. Haley!" the man exclaimed. "Have a cheer."

"Oh! oh!" sobbed Aunt 'Mira, shaking like a mold of jelly.

"I don't want a chair!" ejaculated Nelson, placing his bag on the uncleared dining table. "I've just heard of it. What does it mean?"

"She's gone," Uncle Jason said gloomily.

"*They've* gone," sobbed Aunt 'Mira.

"We dunno *that*—not for sure. We don't know they're gone together. Janice didn't say a thing about Marty in her letter," and he pointed to an open letter on the table. "Read it, Mr. Haley," he added.

The schoolmaster seized the note Janice had left on her pin-cushion and read:

"DEAR UNCLE AND AUNT:

"You must not blame me or think too hard of me. I have just *got* to go. Daddy needs me. I am sure I can find him. I could not stay idly in Polktown and wait any longer. I will telegraph you when I reach the Border. Don't blame me. *I just have to go!* Love. JANICE."

"I might have known it! I might have known it!" muttered the schoolmaster.

"Ye might have known *what?*" demanded Mr. Day.

"That she meant what she said. She told me last evening she was going, and I didn't believe her."

"Oh, Mr. Haley!" cried Aunt 'Mira. "And ye didn't tell us in time——"

"In time for what?" exploded her husband. "Hi Guy! I'd like to see *any* man stop *any* female when she's sot on doin' a thing."

"But she's gone alone clear down there to Mexico and——"

"Where's Marty?" demanded Nelson.

"Oh! she don't say nothin' about him," sobbed the woman. "His bed ain't been slep' in, an——"

"If Marty has disappeared, too," the schoolmaster said with decision, "you can be sure he is with her."

"Do ye believe so?" asked Mr. Day doubtfully. "Seems to me she wouldn't have encouraged the boy to go off that-a-way."

"Of course not," Nelson agreed. "But I have an idea that, of all of us, Marty was the wisest. You'll learn he suspected Janice of planning to go away and he has gone with her, or followed her."

"That boy!" ejaculated his mother.

"If he has——" began Uncle Jason; but Nelson continued:

"I have considerable confidence in Marty. At least, he is a courageous young rascal. I fancy he

has followed Janice, unknown to her, and with the desire of helping her."

"But he is only a bo-o-oy," wailed his mother again.

"Say!" Uncle Jason said suddenly, "he's a good deal of a man, come to think on't. I b'lieve you air right, Mr. Haley."

"That does not, however," said Nelson, shaking his head, "change the fact that Janice, even with such an escort as Marty, should not go down there. I am greatly worried."

"Wal, don't you think *we* be?" demanded Uncle Jason.

"Yes. I know how you must feel. But think how *I* feel, Mr. Day," the schoolmaster said gently. "I believe I should have thrown up everything when she told me she was determined to go, and have accompanied her instead of letting Marty do it."

"I snum!" ejaculated Mr. Day, "don't I feel jest the same way? Janice is a *do something* gal, sure enough. We'd oughter knowed she wouldn't sit quiet to home here when Broxton was in sech trouble."

"But she's only a gal!" repeated his wife.

"She's a diff'rent gal from most," declared Mr. Day.

"And poor Marty! How'd he ever get money enough to go with her?" mourned the good woman.

"His bankbook's gone," said Mr. Day. "He's

proberly took ev'ry cent he could rake an' scrape. You *would* give him that bankbook to keep, Almiry."

"Oh! oh!" sobbed Mrs. Day.

"But—but how did Janice get money enough to take such a long journey?" asked Nelson hesitatingly.

"Sold her ortermobile," stated Uncle Jason gruffly.

"No!"

"Yes, she did. I been over to Cross Moore's an' put it right up to him. You know what he is. He'd buy a cripple's wooden laig if he could see his way ter makin' a profit on it. He got the car at a cheap price, I calculate, and agreed to say nothing about it till arter Janice had gone. Oh! I ain't worried about Janice's means. It's what may happen to her down there."

"She can't get beyond the Border," Nelson declared.

"We don't know. You know how detarmined Janice is. I snum! we'd *oughter* know her detarmination now."

"It don't matter. Nothin' don't matter," Mrs. Day groaned. "She's gone—an' Marty's gone. An' what ever will become of 'em 'way down there among them murderin' Mexicaners——"

"Well, well, Almiry! They ain't got there yet," put in Mr. Day.

Nelson Haley had never felt so helpless in all his

life. Not even when charged with stealing a collection of gold coins that had been intrusted to the care of the School Committee, had the young man felt any more uncertain as to his future course. What should he do? Indeed, what could he do now that Janice had really departed from Polktown?

Whether it would have been quite the proper thing or not for him to have accompanied the girl on her long journey, did not now enter into the situation. Janice was gone and he was here—and he felt himself to be a rather useless sort of fellow. He now thought very seriously of the last words Janice had spoken to him the day before:

"If it were *you* who were wounded and alone down there in Mexico do you suppose any power on earth would keep me from going to you?"

The schoolmaster's heart thrilled again at the thought. *She meant it*—of course she did! Janice, he should have known, always meant what she said.

But now, in the light of her courageous action in leaving alone for the Border, the memory of her words impressed the young man more deeply. She would have dared any danger, she intimated, had it been Nelson who she believed needed her; why should he have doubted for a moment that she was brave enough to seek her wounded father?

"I'm a selfish, ignorant fool!" Nelson railed in secret. "I do not deserve to be loved by such a girl. I don't half appreciate her. What a helpless, in-

effectual thing I am! And what now can I do to aid or encourage her? Nothing! I have lost my chance. *What* can she think of me?"

He thus took himself to task that evening in his study. The whole town rang with the story of Janice's departure and with the belief that Marty Day had either accompanied his cousin or followed her in a boyish attempt to assist in her mission.

"She ain't like other gals," Mrs. Beaseley mourned at the supper table. "*Do* have another helpin' of col' meat, Mr. Haley—an' try this pertater salad. It's by a new receipt.

"I count her quite able ter take keer of herself ord'narily, Mr. Haley. What worries *me* is her eatin'," added the widow, passing the plate of hot biscuits to her boarder.

"If folks don't eat right, as my sainted Charles often said, they ain't got the chance't of a rabbit when anythin' happens 'em. No, sir! *Do* eat that quarter o' layer cake, Mr. Haley. 'Tis the las' piece an' I do despise to make a fresh cake while there's any of the old left.

"The eatin' on them trains an' in them railroad stations, they tell me, is somethin' dreffful. I *hope* you'll make out a supper, Mr. Haley."

Hopewell Drugg, in a worried state of mind, came across the street to consult Nelson. He did not know what his wife would do or say when she learned that Janice had left town.

"I sincerely hope Miss Janice will find her father and bring him back to Polktown soon," the storekeeper said.

"Do you believe she *can?*" asked the schoolmaster, rather startled.

"Why not?" was Hopewell's response. "She has never yet, to my knowledge, failed in anything she has set out to do."

This statement furnished Nelson with another positive shock. Not for a moment had he considered that Janice would accomplish what she had set about doing. It seemed impossible to his mind that a mere girl could get into Mexico and return again with her wounded father. Yet here was Hopewell Drugg implicitly believing in her ultimate success!

Mrs. Scattergood buzzed like a very cross bumblebee. She seemed only too glad that Janice had done something to shock Polktown.

"Wal! what could you expect from a gal that's allus had her own way an' been allowed to go ahead an' boss things the way Janice Day has? I don't approve of these new-fashioned gals. What diff'rent could ye expec'?"

"That's a fac'," agreed Marm Parraday, who chanced to be the recipient of this opinion. "Ye could expec' Janice Day to do *just* what she done—an' I tell 'em all so. She ain't no namby-pamby, Susie-Sozzles sort of a gal—no, ma'am!

"Lem says he doesn't see how she found the pluck to do it. But it didn't s'prise *me* none, Miz' Scattergood. A gal that's done what Janice Day has for, and in, Polktown is jest as able to do things down there in Mexico."

"Why, haow you talk!" gasped Mrs. Scattergood, finding to her amazement that the hotelkeeper's wife did not at all agree with her opinion of Janice. "She's nothin' but a gal. In *aour* day——"

"Ye-as, I know," admitted Marm Parraday. "When we was gals women's rights and women's doin's warn't much hearn tell on. Still, Miz' Scattergood, I wasn't so meek as I know on. But mebbe, women was mostly chattels—like horses an'—an' chickens. But if that was so, that day's gone by, thanks be! An' it's gone by in Polktown a deal because of this same Janice Day. Oh, yes! I know what she's done here, an' all about it. Mebbe she didn't *know* she was a-doin' of it. But if Polktown ever erects a statue to the one person more than another that 'woke it up, it'll hafter be the figger of jest a gal, with a strapful o' schoolbooks in one hand, the other hand held out friendly-like, and that queer, sweetenin' little smile of Janice on its face."

Yes, Janice and what she had done was the single topic of conversation all over town that night. Those who knew her best did not call her mission a "silly, child's trick." Oh, no, indeed!

Down the hill below Hopewell Drugg's store and

below the widow's home where Nelson lodged, in the nearest house indeed to Pine Cove on that street, and to Lottie's echo, Mr. Cross Moore sat with his invalid wife. The usual orphan from the county asylum who was just then doing penance for her sins in acting as Mrs. Moore's maid, had gone to bed. The woman in her wheel-chair watched Mr. Moore from under frowning brows.

"I expect you think, Cross Moore, that you've done a smart trick—a-buyin' that car so't Janice Day could get out o' town. The neighbors air all talkin' about it."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry, Mother," the man said quietly. "Janice is all right. She'll make good. She's quite a smart gal, is Janice."

"Ha!" snapped the invalid. "That may be. I guess it's so. She pulled the wool over *your* eyes, I don't doubt. That ol' contraption she sold you ain't wuth ha'f what ye paid for it, Cross Moore."

CHAPTER XVI

MARTY RUNS INTO TROUBLE

JANICE DAY was tired. She had to admit that. But she would not stop over in Chicago even twenty-four hours to rest.

There is scarcely any way of traveling that so eats up the reserve forces of even a perfectly well person as an unaccustomed ride on the rail. No matter how comfortable seats and berths may be, the confinement, the continual jar of the train, and the utter change from the habits of the usual daily life quite bear down the spirit of the traveler.

Especially is the person traveling alone affected. Janice really was glad she had the companionship of Madam on her journey beyond Chicago. Although the thoughts of the black-eyed woman seemed to run strongly to robbery, she was not lacking in information and could talk amusingly of her travels.

She seemed familiar with Europe as well as with much of America. Her knowledge of the Latin-American countries, however, exceeded that of the United States. Just what nationality she was Janice could not guess, although she believed there was some Hebraic blood in Madam's veins.

However, the woman so succeeded in impressing Janice regarding the care of her remaining bank-notes that before their train left Chicago the girl took the precaution to secrete her money in a different place upon her person. At the same time, she folded up a piece of newspaper into a packet and pinned it to the place in her corsage where the notes had been.

"It does no harm to do this—and say nothing about it," thought Janice demurely.

Madam made her change in transportation with some skill, and had again secured the berth under that assigned to Janice. They sat together by day, conversing or reading, and always took their meals together in the dining car.

Had Janice known that behind her in the same train, rode her Cousin Marty, she would have been both amazed and troubled.

Marty held to his ticket on this train; but he had seen a chance to sell his berth, and, frugal Yankee that he was, he had done this.

"Hi tunket!" the boy told himself, "that ticket seller thought mebbe he put one over on me when he made me buy a berth reservation clean through. But to *my* mind those berths ain't a bit more comfortable than a seat in a day coach." For there was a day coach attached to this train.

He said this after he had overheard a man in the smoking compartment complaining about his in-

ability to obtain the reservation of a berth at Chicago. There was nothing timid about Marty Day. He immediately marched up to the man and drove a bargain with him worthy of Uncle Jason himself.

"Every little bit helps," remarked Marty, as he folded the bills the man gave him and tucked them with the rest of his little wad down into the bottom of his inside vest pocket, pinning the money there for safety.

Marty was not disturbed in the least about losing his funds, whether Janice was or not. And he continued to be fully as frugal in his expenditures as he had been at first.

At Chicago Marty had had a very close call—or thought he had. In the crowd in the station he almost ran into Janice. She was with the black-eyed woman and that was probably why his cousin had not noticed him. But it had been near!

He did not know just how Janice would take his surveillance, and the boy had decided it would be better for him to remain in the background unless something extraordinary happened and not reveal himself to her until they reached the Border.

So, to make his identification by his cousin doubly impossible, as he thought, Marty used the hour's wait at Chicago to supply himself with a disguise!

It is not on record that any boy ever lived who did not, at some stage of his career, dream of put-

ting on some simple disguise and appearing before his friends and family as "the mysterious stranger." Marty was not exempt from the usual kinds of boyish folly. He bought and affixed to his upper lip a small black mustache.

The sturdy, freckled-faced boy with the stubby mustache stuck upon his lip, made a very amusing appearance. Under close scrutiny the falsity of his hirsute adornment was easily detected, of course.

The gentleman who had boarded the train at Chicago too late to obtain a berth was vastly amused by Marty's assumption of maturity. Marty's voice was beginning to change and that alone would have revealed his youth in spite of a full growth of whiskers.

"You're pretty young to be traveling alone," this gentleman remarked to Marty after the deal for the berth had been consummated. "Although I see you have all your wits about you, young man."

"Oh, I dunno," drawled the boy from Polktown, trying to stroke the mustache with a knowing air.

"I can see the mustache," grinned Marty's fellow-traveler. "But it isn't a very good fit and it certainly does not match your hair. That down on your cheek, young fellow, is a dead give away. I'd take off the mustache if I were you."

Marty flushed like a boiling lobster. "I—I can't," he stuttered.

"Why not?"

Marty confessed—partially. He told about his cousin in the other car and how he had come on this long journey very secretly to watch over and protect Janice.

Despite the evident ignorance of the boy there was something about his actions that impressed this man with the really fine qualities of Marty's character. He asked the boy:

"Have you telegraphed back to your father to reassure him of your safety—ahem—and your cousin's?"

"No," Marty said. "That runs into money, don't it? I—I was going to write."

"Send a night letter," advised the man. "That will not be very expensive. And it will relieve your folks' minds."

So Marty did this, sending the message from a station where the train lingered for a few minutes. The result of the receipt of this dispatch in Polktown was to start a series of quite unforeseen events; but Marty had no idea of this when he wrote:

"I got my eye on Janice. She is all right so far."

As far as he knew the boy told the truth in that phrase. Several times each day Marty managed to get a glimpse of his cousin. On almost every such occasion she was in the company of the tall, black-

eyed, foreign-looking woman who had been with Janice when Marty had run against them in the Chicago railway station.

"Those two's havin' it nice an' soft," Marty thought as he observed them through the window of the dining car when the long train stopped at a station and the boy got out to stretch his legs.

"Come in and have dinner with me, Martin," said the gentleman to whom he had sold his berth reservation, seeing the boy apparently gazing hungrily in at the diners.

"Cricky! I don't believe I'd dare. She'd see me," said the boy.

"But I thought you considered yourself well disguised," suggested the other, laughing.

"Say! You don't know what sharp eyes Janice has got. And you saw yourself that this mustache was false."

"Oh! but at a distance——"

"Hi tunket! I'll go you," stammered the boy. "But let's sit back of Janice."

This was agreed to and the much-amused gentleman ushered his young friend to a seat in the dining car, wherein Marty faced the black-eyed Madam while Janice Day's back was toward him.

Since her mind had gradually become relieved of its disturbance occasioned by the mysterious lunch which had come into her possession, Janice's only serious thoughts were of her father and the task

that awaited her at the Border. She allowed her thoughts to dwell upon the uncertainties of her venture as little as possible. Worrying would not help. She knew that to be an undoubted truth. So she gave herself up to such amusements of travel as there were and to the informative conversation of the black-eyed woman with whom she had become such "goot friends."

Janice Day was quite a sophisticated young woman despite the fact that all her life had been spent in two very quiet communities. The girl was acquainted through broad reading with both the good and evil fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Innocence does not mean ignorance in this day and generation, and the modern trend of thought and education can be heartily thanked for this change from the old standards, if for nothing else.

Janice was really amused by Madam's so-often expressed fears of being robbed. The girl said nothing to her about the change she had made in carrying her surplus money; and she continued to keep the packet of newspaper pinned to her corsage.

As they lingeringly ate their dinner on this particular evening in the dining car the black-eyed woman suddenly betrayed anxiety:

"My dear!" she cried under her breath. "I do believe there is that boy again!"

"What boy, Madam?" Janice asked curiously, but without alarm.

"I have warned you of him before—yes," hissed Madam tragically. "He iss the same, I am sure! He tried to rob you in Chicago!"

"Oh, Madam!" Janice said, tempted to laugh. "I think you must be mistaken."

"Oh, no, I am not, my dear," the woman said very earnestly indeed. "And he iss yet on our train. I see him watching you of a frequency—yes! You will not be warned——"

"Where is he?" Janice asked, turning slowly to look back, for Madam's black eyes were fixed in that direction.

"There! At the table facing this way. With the man in the pepper-and-salt suit, my dear."

Janice flashed a glance at the "disguised" Marty, flushing as she did so. Her gaze lingered on the boy only an instant, and without dreaming of his presence on the train how should she recognize her cousin?

"Why! he isn't exactly a boy, is he?" she said to the Madam. "He wears a pronounced mustache."

"Yes? Perhaps it is not the same, then," sighed the woman. "But his interest in you, my dear, is marked."

"Perhaps it is in *you* he is interested," said Janice, smiling. "You have made a conquest, Madam."

"Ach! of that so-little man? It would be my fate!" cried the majestic creature. "It iss always little men that fall in love with me—soh!"

It was apparent, however, that Madam kept a watchful eye on the "so-little man" for she spoke of Marty's surveillance frequently thereafter. Janice failed to view this person who so troubled her companion, near enough to really see clearly any one feature. At a distance the mustache disguised Marty Day's expression of countenance.

All was not destined to go smoothly with Marty, however, during the entire journey to the Border. They crossed Texas by the T. & P. route and near Sweetwater there was an accident. A train had been ditched ahead of that on which Janice and Marty rode and, the track being torn up for some distance and the right of way blocked, the train was halted a long time in the evening at a way station.

It was merely a cluster of houses and stores, a shack for a station, a freight house and corral with cattle-chutes, and a long platform on which the uneasy passengers might stroll to relieve the tedium of the wait.

Of this last privilege Janice and Madam availed themselves. Marty, too, feeling for the nonce both lonely and homesick, was in the crowd on the long platform. He heartily wished he could reveal himself to Janice so as to have somebody "homey" to talk to. Polktown suddenly seemed a long, long way off to the boy.

"Hi tunket!" he murmured to himself. "These

stars down here in Texas seem to have got all twisted. They've gone an' switched the Big Dipper on me, I do believe."

And while he chanced to have his head back looking aloft he ran right into Janice and her companion. The Madam screamed and seized the boy by the arm.

"It iss the same—er—young man!" she hissed. "I tell you he iss always at our heels—yes. *Now* will you belief me? Feel! is your money safe?"

Janice clapped her hand to her bosom; the packet she had thought so securely pinned there was gone.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I *have* lost it! It is——"

"It has been stolen! You have been robbed! This boy has it!" the black-eyed woman declared with conviction. "What have I told you right along? But I have the thief. No, sir! you may not wr-r-riggle out of my so-strong grasp!"

CHAPTER XVII

TWO EXPLOSIONS

MARTY had no desire to have his identity revealed to his cousin in any such belittling manner as this. He had dreamed of Janice getting into some difficulty, and his stepping forward to defend and protect her. But this situation covered him with confusion.

The large woman with the black eyes and the foreign speech possessed muscle, too, as he quickly discovered. He could not twist himself out of her grasp on the dark platform.

"I have the thief," repeated Madam. "Soh!"

"Oh! are you sure?" gasped Janice.

"You haf lost your money, eh?" demanded her companion. "Well, then, *I* haf secured the thief—soh!"

A trainman came along with a lantern. Its light, suddenly cast upon the little group, revealed Marty's face more clearly.

"What's the matter here?" asked the trainman, his curiosity aroused. But Janice moved closer to the boy twisting in Madam's grasp. She peered into his face and her own countenance paled.

"It—it *can't* be!" she gasped. "You—you—*Marty Day!*"

She made a dive for the silly-looking mustache. Marty squealed energetically:

"You behave! Stop it, Janice! Ouch! that hurts! Don't you know the blamed thing's stuck on with shoemaker's wax?"

"Marty Day!" repeated the girl, "how did you come here?"

"You know heem—yes?" gasped the black-eyed woman.

"Why, he's my cousin! He's followed me all the way from home! How ever he did it——"

Then she stopped suddenly, putting her hand to her bosom again.

"But I *have* lost it—the packet," she cried.

"Your money—— Ach!" ejaculated Madam.

"What's that?" asked the trainman. "You lost something?"

"I bet you have," exclaimed Marty. "No girl can take care of money right. Where'd you have it?"

Janice motioned to her bosom. The trainman lowered his lantern and cast its radiance in a wider circle on the platform.

"What's this here?" demanded the boy, and sprang immediately to secure what his sharp eyes had observed lying at the feet of the black-eyed woman.

"Oh! that must be it," Janice said, trying to seize it from her cousin's hand.

"Aw, let's make sure," growled Marty, at once taking the lead in affairs. "Nice way to carry money, I must say—wrapped in a handkerchief! Hi tunket! what d'you know about *this?*"

He had unfolded the handkerchief and revealed—newspaper. That was all. The black-eyed woman stepped back with a sudden intake of breath. She glared at Janice.

"Huh! Somebody flimflammed you?" demanded Marty, staring, too, at his cousin.

"No-o," the girl admitted faintly. "I—I did it myself."

"You did what?" asked the interested trainman.

"I wrapped that paper up and hid it in my blouse. My money is safe."

"It is!" cried Marty. "Sure? Where you got it hid?"

"Never mind; it's safe," said Janice tartly.

The trainman chuckled as he went his way.

"Marty!" began the girl when Madam broke in:

"You are well engaged, I see," she said sharply. "I will bid you goot evening," and she moved majestically toward the car.

"Who is she?" demanded Marty, following Madam with suspicious eye.

"I don't know," confessed his cousin.

"Say! are you sure you got your money safe?"

"Yes."

"Where?" he questioned insistently.

"It's none of your business, Marty Day," snapped Janice, "but if you *must* know, it's pinned inside my stocking—so now!"

"Sure," chuckled Marty. "I might have guessed. Most popular national bank there is. Say! we'd better get aboard. Train's goin' to start again."

"You come with me, Marty; I want to know what this means," Janice said, seizing his hand as they hurried to board the train. "How did you get down here? Who told you you might come? Mercy! I can't understand it at all. And that silly mustache——"

"Cricky! I wish I could get the blame thing off," said the boy, touching his lip tenderly. "You mighty near tore my face apart when you grabbed at it."

"It's the most ridiculous thing. Oh! I wonder where Madam went to?" For the black-eyed woman was not in her usual seat. Indeed, her hand-baggage was no longer there, nor could Janice see her anywhere in the car. "I believe she is offended," said the girl.

"Huh? What about?" Marty queried.

"Why, because of that foolish trick of mine—the packet of newspapers. She thought I had my money pinned to my underwaist all the time."

The boy's eyes twinkled shrewdly. "Huh! maybe," he said. "But you don't know a thing about her. 'Tisn't very smart to make acquaintances on the cars, I calculate."

"Goodness! hear the boy!" gasped Janice. "Sit down here. I want to know all about it—— Why, Marty!"

"Huh? What's sprung a leak now?"

"It must have been you who gave me that lunch!"

"Oh! on the train coming down from the Landing? Sure," Marty answered. "I knew you'd never think of getting anything decent to eat yourself."

"You blessed angel boy!"

"Oh! I'm a Sarah Finn, I am—as Walky Dexter calls 'em."

"Calls *what?*"

"Angels," said the boy, grinning. "There's one breed called something that sounds like Sarah Finn."

"Seraphim!"

"That's the ticket. Well?" for his cousin suddenly seized his arm and shook him.

"Tell me all about it—at once!"

"Why—er—that lunch I got off'n the cook aboard the *Constance Colfax.*"

"Marty! don't tease. I don't care about the lunch now—it was eaten so long ago."

"Hi tunket! and you haven't eat nothing like it

since," declared the boy warmly. "You been fair wallowin' in luxury."

"Marty!"

"Yes, you have," he pursued. "I don't see how you come to have any money left at all—eatin' your three squares a day in the dining car. Not me! I get lunches at the stop-over places, I do."

"But I saw you in the dining car," Janice said, with sudden conviction.

"Yep. Once. And you can bet that I didn't pay for my supper that time. I was treated."

"But you're not telling me a thing I want to know," cried the girl. "Did Uncle Jason send you? Never!"

"I'll break it to you easy," grinned Marty. "I did just what you did."

"What do you mean?"

"I ran away; that's what I did."

"Didn't you leave word for your father and mother? *I* did."

"I telegraphed," said Marty proudly, taking full credit for that act. "Told 'em you were all right and that I had my eye on you."

"Well! Of all things!"

"Yep. 'Tis kinder strange, isn't it?" said Marty, blowing a sigh. "Don't scarcely seem real to me."

"But your mother—and Uncle Jason! They will be worried to death about you, Marty."

"Huh! How about you?" demanded her cousin.

"But you are only a boy."

"And you're only a girl," he retorted.

"Marty, I *had* to come," she told him gravely.

"Of course you did. I know it. Frank and Nelse, and the rest of 'em, couldn't see it; but *I* saw it. I was wise to you right away, so I watched."

He went on to relate his experiences in getting away from Polktown, chuckling over his own wit.

"But your mother and father will never forgive me," she sighed.

"What they got to forgive you for?" demanded Marty.

"If it hadn't been for me you never would have run away. And I don't really see what good it has done, your having done so, anyway. You can't help me find daddy."

"Why not?" snapped the boy. "What d'you think I came 'way off here for? Just to sit around and suck my thumb? Huh! I guess I can do as much toward finding Uncle Brocky as ever you will, Janice Day."

"I am afraid," the girl sighed, "that you don't realize what a task there is before me."

"Before *us*," growled Marty.

Janice smiled faintly without otherwise acknowledging the correction.

"Say! what have you done toward learning how

to get across that river and up there to San Cristoval?" the boy suddenly asked.

"Why—*that* is too far ahead. I shall have to be guided by circumstances."

"Ye-as! That's what the feller said when they were goin' to hang him. But I've been lookin' ahead and I've been askin' questions."

"Of whom, Marty?" his cousin cried.

"Folks. I got acquainted with a good many back there in the smoker."

"I thought you intimated it was dangerous to make such acquaintances?" suggested Janice.

"'Tis—for girls," announced her cousin stoutly.

"And why not for boys, I'd like to know?"

"'Cause nothin' can hurt boys. They're tough," grinned Marty. "Now, this big woman you been hobnobbing with——"

"Oh! I wonder what can have become of Madam?"

"Maybe she had reason for cutting her tow-rope," said the slangy boy, "just as soon's she saw you had somebody to take care of you. Oh, yes! Did you notice just where I picked up that package of newspapers that you lost?"

"Oh, Marty!"

"Almost under the feet of Miz' Madam, as you call her," went on the boy. "She was right. You *were* robbed. Somebody took that packet out of your blouse all right, all right!"

"Why, Marty! how very terribly you talk!"

"Ye-as. Maybe I do. But she certainly was kind o' crusty when she left us there on the platform."

"Oh! I wouldn't have offended her," grieved Janice. "I don't believe she was a bad woman at all, Marty Day."

"I don't know anything about her," declared Marty. "But you'd better be mighty careful with folks you meet. Now, the men I've been talkin' with are regular fellers, they are. And they've told me a lot about what we'll haf to do when we get to that Rio Grande River."

"Marty, dear! It may be dangerous. I can't let you run into peril for me."

"No. But I will for Uncle Brocky—if I have to. And *you* won't stop me," he declared. "'Sides, it isn't goin' to be so dangerous as you think if we go about it right."

"How do you know?"

"Why, up North there we thought that the Border was like a barbed-wire fence that you had to climb through ev'ry time you went from the United States into Mexico an' back again, and it was lucky if you didn't ketch your pants on the barbed wire an' get 'em tore, too!" and the boy was grinning broadly again.

"But 'tisn't nothing like that. You'd think from what you read in the newspapers that the towns on

the northern side of the Border was spang full of Americans—white folks that talk English, you know—while every town over the Border and in shootin' distance of it, as you might say, was all populated with nothin' but greasers."

"Well?" Janice asked faintly.

"Why, 'tisn't nothing like that. Lots of Texas towns along the Border ain't got anybody in 'em but Mexican folks, and Mexican-Spanish is the official language. Yes, *sir!*" said Marty, proud of his acquired acknowledge.

"The officers of the town are Mexs like everybody else. They're peaceable enough and law-abiding enough and they go back and forth over the river and into Mexico just as they please.

"Now, what we want to do is to pick out one of these little squash-towns along the bank of the Rio Grande, drive over to it in an automobile from the railroad, and make a dicker with some greaser to ferry us across the river to some town on the other side."

"And then what, Marty?" asked Janice, made all but breathless by the manner in which her cousin seemed to have grasped the situation.

"Why, then we'll get another automobile, or a carriage, or something, and steer a course for this San Cristoval place. It's on a branch railroad, but the railroad ain't running, so they tell me. We can't hoof it there, for it's too far from the Border; but

there must be roads of some kind and we'll find something to ride in—or——"

"Why, Marty!" gasped Janice, stopping him. "Your being here—on this very train with me—certainly *was* an explosion. But *this* is a greater one. Don't say any more. I can't stand any more excitement to-night," and she was more than a little in earnest although she smiled.

"Here comes the porter to make up the berths. You'll have to go. And we'll talk it over in the morning, early. And *do* get rid of that mustache, for we'll be at Fort Hancock to-morrow and that is where I have about decided to leave the train."

"Sure," said the very confident Marty. "That's just the place I'd picked out myself to drop off at. All right, Janice. See you in the morning. Er——"

"Well, what?" asked his cousin.

"Hadn't you better let me take that money of yours for safe keeping?"

"No, Marty," she said demurely. "We won't put all our eggs in one basket. You know, even *you* might be robbed. Good-night, dear boy!"

CHAPTER XVIII

SOMETHING VERY EXCITING

JANICE did not see the black-eyed woman who had been so much in her company across the continent again that night; and in the morning she found that the berth under her own had remained empty. Upon asking the porter she learned that Madam had left the train at Sweetwater.

"And never said good-bye to me!" Janice thought with some compunctions of conscience. "Is it possible that she was offended because of those pieces of newspaper I carried in my bosom? It did look as though I doubted her honesty."

For the girl could not believe, as Marty had suggested, that the odd, foreign-talking woman had had designs upon her money.

"You never can tell about those foreigners," Marty said gruffly at breakfast time. He had managed to remove the mustache and his lip was sore.

Marty had all the narrow-minded prejudices against foreigners of the inexperienced.

"You're going to have a fine time down here among these Mexicans," his cousin told him.

"Watch 'em. That's *my* motto," cried Marty. "And, say! ain't some o' the greasers funny-lookin' creatures?"

At every little, hot station they passed (for there was a startling difference in the temperature compared with the frosty nights and mornings they had left behind in Vermont) there were several of the broad-brimmed, high-crowned hats typically *Méjico,* as well as the shawl-draped figures of hatless women, and dozens of dirty, little-clothed children.

"Why! it looks like a foreign country already," Janice sighed.

But Marty was only eager. His eyes fairly snapped and he almost forgot to eat the very nice breakfast that Janice had ordered, he was so deeply interested in all that was outside the car windows.

Yet the outlook for the most part was rather dreary between stations, while the stations themselves were "as ugly as a mud fence" to quote Marty.

"But everything is new," said the boy. "I ain't missin' anything."

The conductor viséd their tickets for a stop-over at Fort Hancock and agreed to "pull her down" for that station although it was not a stopping point for through trains.

"You'll have to go on up to El Paso on a local,"

he drawled; "and you'll have to mix up with greasers an' such."

"How do you know we shall want to go on to El Paso at all?" asked Janice, smiling.

"Why, ma'am, nobody ever stays in these river towns any longer'n they kin he'p. And outside of the soldiers stationed hereabout there's only seventy-five folks or so, in the place—only two of *them* white."

"Oh!" Janice involuntarily gasped.

"Ol' José Pez keeps the store and hotel. He's not such a robber as *some;* he's too lazy—and too proud, I reckon. You got folks at the post?"

"We expect to meet Lieutenant Cowan," Janice said.

The cousins were the only passengers to leave the train, and they were quite unexpected. The natives, who *en masse* always met the trains scheduled to stop at the station, refused to believe that the "limited" had stopped. They preferred to believe that the appearance of the two young strangers was an hallucination; better such a mystery in their placid lives than the unexpected reality.

Several little children came to stare at Janice and Marty standing on the platform before the corrugated iron station, in which there was not even an agent. *One* of these infants was dressed. He wore a torn hat evidently having belonged originally to someone with a much larger head than he pos-

sessed. He had to lift up its brim with both hands to peer at the strangers.

"They are *so* dirty," murmured Janice.

"Gee!" sighed Marty, his freckled face brightening. "Ain't it immense?"

His cousin stared at him in an amazement that gradually changed to something like admiration. She suddenly realized that, if she could have chosen her escort, nobody would have so well suited as Marty Day under these distressing circumstances. He might not be very wise, but he was immensely enthusiastic.

He was staring now beyond the line of haphazard shacks and adobe buildings that bordered the one street, into the jungle of mesquite and cactus growing in the dry waste of sand that almost surrounded the settlement—and he could smile!

While on the train they had passed many irrigated grapefruit orchards bordered by lordly date palms; but the tangle of mesquite and cactus was always just over the ocatilla fences. They had likewise seen a sprawling, low-roofed ranchhouse here and there from the train windows, but there was nothing like that comfort suggested here.

Most of the buildings in sight were one-room dwellings of adobe, with an open shed at the back built of four corner posts supporting a thatch roof, on which peppers were still sunning, late as was the season. Here and there between these forlorn huts

grew an oleander or an umbrella chinaberry; and there were vines on some of the walls, masking their ugliness. But for the most part the village was a dreary and distressing looking collection of habitations.

Janice and Marty moved along the street of the town. There was no walk, and the roadway was deep in dust. Marty carried Janice's bag and strode along as though "monarch of all he surveyed." To tell the truth, the girl was closer to tears than she had been since leaving Polktown.

Their objective point was a large frame building, roofed with corrugated iron and with a veranda in front, at the end of the street. The sides of this more important looking building were trellised with vines. There was, too, the promise of cleanliness and coolness about the place. Across the front they read the sign:

JOSÉ PEZ, MERCHANDISE

A solemn old man, burned almost black by the sun and with the skin of his face as wrinkled as an alligator's hide, rose from a comfortable chair on the porch to greet them. He wore a long white goatee and military mustache. He had an air of immense dignity.

"*Buenos días, señorita! Buenos días, señor!*" and he bowed politely.

"Are—are you Mr. Pez?" asked Janice timidly.

The old man bowed low again. "Don José Almoreda Tomas Sauceda Pez—at your service, señorita."

"We wish to find Lieutenant Cowan. He is stationed here."

"No longer, señorita," said the old fellow, shaking his head in vigorous denial. "He is gone with his troop a month now. I do not know his present station. At the telegraph office the operator may be able to tell you. To my sorrow I cannot. Lieutenant Cowan is my friend."

"And my father's friend. My father is Mr. Broxton Day," Janice hastened to tell him.

"Señor Broxton Day?" repeated the don. "I am sorrowful, señorita. I do not know heem. But we have a—how do you call it in Eenglish?—Ah! a mutual friend in Lieutenant Cowan. Come in. My poor house and all that I possess is at your service."

"You—do you conduct a hotel here, Señor Pez?" suggested Janice.

"Surely! Surely!" declared the old man with another sweeping gesture.

"We must get rooms here then, Marty," she said to her cousin; "and perhaps the gentleman can tell us how we may get across the river and to San Cristoval."

"You let *me* do the talking," Marty said rather

gruffly. "I'll make the bargain. I've found out that a dollar Mex ain't worth but fifty cents."

He said this in a low voice; but the don was already summoning somebody whom he called "Rosita" from the interior of the house. The house was divided in the middle, one half of the lower floor being given up to the exigencies of trade. On the other side of the hall that ran through to the rear were the hotel rooms.

Rosita appeared. She was a woman shaped like a pyramid. Even her head, on which the black coarse hair was bobbed high, finished in a peak—the unmistakable mark of the ancient Aztec blood in her veins. Her shoulders sloped away from her three chins and it seemed as though the greatest circumference of her body must be at her ankles, for her skirt flared. Rosita had guessed at her waist-line and had tied a string there, for her dress was a one-piece garment and she had no actual knowledge of where her waistband should be placed.

But in spite of her strange shape and dark complexion, Rosita was still very pretty of countenance and had wonderfully white teeth and great, violet eyes. She was still in her early thirties. A toddling little one clung to her skirt.

"Take the *niñito* hence, Rosita, and show the señorita to the best room above. Her *caballero* ——?" Señor Pez looked at Marty doubtfully and the boy struck in:

"That's all right, old feller. It don't matter where I camp. We'll talk about that pretty soon. You go ahead and see the room, Janice, and wash up. Maybe they can give you dinner."

"Surely! Surely!" said the don, shooing the *niñito* out of the way as though it were a chicken.

Rosita mounted to the upper floor in the lead. Janice followed with a queer feeling of emptiness at her heart—the first symptom of homesickness.

But the mountainous Rosita seemed as kindly intentioned as the old don. She opened the door with a flourish on a broad, almost bare room, with an iron bed, a washstand and bureau of maple, a rocking chair, and with curtains at the two windows.

On the floor was a straw matting and over its dry surface Janice heard a certain rustling—a continual rhythmic movement. As she stared about the floor, hesitating to enter, Rosita said:

"It is be-a-u-tiful room—yes, huh?"

"But—but what is that noise?" asked the girl from the North, her mind filled with thoughts of tarantulas and centipedes.

"Huh? Nottin'. *That?* Jes' fleas—sand fleas. They hop, hop, hop. No mind them. You hongree—yes, huh? I go get you nice dinner—yes, huh?"

She departed, quite filling the stairway as she descended to the lower floor.

"My goodness!" thought Janice, with a sudden hysterical desire to laugh. "I should hate to have

the house catch fire and wait my turn to go downstairs after Rosita!"

It took no conflagration to hasten her preparations for descent on this occasion. She met Marty at the foot of the staircase. The boy's face was actually pallid, and against this background his freckles seemed twice their usual size.

"What is it? What has happened?" demanded Janice, seizing his arm.

Marty drew her farther from the foot of the staircase to where she could see through a narrow doorway into the store.

"See there!" the boy hissed.

"See what? Oh, Marty! you frighten me."

"'Tain't nothin' to be frightened of," he assured her. "See that feller with the red vest?"

"I see the red waistcoat—yes," admitted Janice, peering into the gloomy store.

"Hi tunket! D'you know who's inside that red vest?" sputtered Marty.

"No-o."

"Tom Hotchkiss!" said her cousin. "What d'you know about that?"

CHAPTER XIX

THE CROSSING

It is not the magnitude of an incident that most shocks the human mind. A happening stuns us in ratio to its unexpectedness.

Now, if there was anything in the whole range of possibilities more unexpected than the appearance of Tom Hotchkiss, the absconding Polktown storekeeper, down in this unlovely Border town, Janice Day could not imagine what that more unexpected occurrence could be.

It took fully a minute for Marty's announcement to really percolate to his cousin's understanding. She stared dumbly at the red vest, which was about all she could see of the man in Don José Almoreda Tomas Sauceda Pez's store, and then turned to Marty, saying:

"Yes?"

"Cricky!" sputtered the boy. "You gone dumb, Janice? Don't you understand?"

"I—I—no, Marty. I do not believe I *do* understand. Is—is it surely that Hotchkiss man?"

"Surest thing you know!" declared the boy.

"What *shall* we do?" and for once Janice felt herself to be quite helpless.

That Marty's wits were bright and shining was proved by his immediate reply:

"You leave it to me. I got a scheme. I'm going to skip over to the telegraph office. We want to find that Lieutenant Cowan if we can, anyway. And I'm going to send what they call a night letter to dad. A *night* letter to a *Day,* see?" and he giggled.

"You get back upstairs into your room and don't let Hotchkiss see you. Get 'em to give you your dinner up there. 'Twon't be nothin' but beans, anyway, I have an idea. That's what they live on down here, they tell me, and comin' from Vermont as I do, beans ain't a luxury to me. I won't mind missing a mess of 'em for once."

"But, Marty——"

"I got a scheme, I tell you," the boy whispered. "Can't stop to tell you what it is. I got to hike."

He dashed out of the door, the only rapidly moving figure in all that town, for even the dogs in the street seemed too lazy to move.

Janice, feeling that she was allowing her cousin to take the lead in a most disgraceful way, yet really not knowing what better to do, mounted the stairs again and went into the room where the sand fleas were "fox-trotting," as she afterwards told Marty, over the straw matting.

The appearance of Tom Hotchkiss in this place was such a shock to the girl that it was some time before she could think connectedly about it. Her cousin had made the discovery and had had time to collect his wits before Janice had descended the stairs. After a time the girl realized what should be done, and she wondered if Marty would really be wise enough to do it.

Her uncle should be informed at once of the presence of Tom Hotchkiss here on the Border. In addition the local authorities should be communicated with and a complaint lodged against the runaway storekeeper and his arrest demanded.

She was not quite sure what would be the correct course to pursue; but when the smiling and ponderous Rosita with the *niñito* still tagging at her skirt brought up her dinner, she asked the woman how one went about having a criminal arrested in that town.

"You want the sheriff—yes, huh?" said Rosita.

"I suppose so."

"The sheriff, heem my hoosban'," said Rosita proudly. "Señor Tomas Morales. But he off now to ar-r-est one weeked man—very weeked. He stole Uncle Tio's pants. Poor Uncle Tio! My hoosban' go far after this weeked man—two days' horse journey."

"And just because the man stole a pair of pants?"

"Yes, huh! You see," explained Rosita, "they were all the pants poor Uncle Tio own, and he now have to wear *serape* only. Only poor Indians appear without pants—yes, huh!"

Janice gazed at the *niñito* and tried to imagine the dignity attached in the peon's mind to a pair of trousers. However, the meal was before her and although the main dish was beans, as Marty had foretold, they were savory and the girl found them good.

These *frijoles* were soft and well seasoned and the cakes, *tortillas,* were tender, too. The coffee was delicious and there was a sweet cake which Janice thought was made of ground bean-flour, but was not sure.

She began to worry about Marty's absence. After Rosita had descended the stairs everything was silent about the store and hotel. It was the hour of *siesta*—though why one hour should be considered more somnolent than another in this place the girl from Vermont could not imagine.

Through the open, unscreened window she could see down the street. At its far end, across the railroad, was a pole from which a faded American flag drooped. This she knew indicated the post telegraph office. The army post was a little more than a mile away.

Where could Marty be all this time? It was two hours since he had darted out of the hotel to send

the night letter to Uncle Jason. Surely he was not still at that telegraph office?

Here and there along the dusty, sunny street figures in broad hats, striped cotton suits, with colored sashes, many of them barefoot or shod only in home-made sandals, leaned against the adobe walls, or lay on their backs in the shade. Groups of shawl-headed, gossipy women with innumerable babies playing about them likewise spotted the gray street with color.

Those males who were awake were smoking the everlasting cigarette or rolling a fresh one. Not a few of the women were smoking, too. Just one of these male figures, lolling against the wall directly opposite her window, did not expel the incense of nicotine through his nostrils. This lad did not smoke.

Janice, for some reason, looked at him more attentively. His high-crowned, gayly banded hat was quite like the headgear of the others; so, too, was the glaringly striped suit he wore of "awning cloth" such as the girls were having sport skirts made of in the North—"too loud for an awning, but just right for a skirt!"

He wore a flowing necktie and shoes and socks —an extravagance that few of the Mexicans in sight displayed. Or was he a Mexican? He was tanned, but not to the saddle color of the native.

Yes! he waved his hand to her. Now that he

knew he had caught her eye he raised his hatbrim and revealed—Marty's face, all a-grin, beneath it!

"Goodness! what *is* that boy doing? He has attempted to disguise himself again," murmured Janice Day.

Then she suddenly apprehended her cousin's reason for thus assuming the dress and air of the town. At least she thought she did. He was watching the store to see that Tom Hotchkiss did not get away. He did not wish to be recognized by the dishonest Polktown storekeeper. And knowing, as she did, that the only local officer of the law, Señor Tomas Morales, was absent she realized that she and Marty must be careful if they wished to have Hotchkiss finally seized.

Here the absconder was, right near the Mexican Border. Once over the Rio Grande, in the present unsettled state of Mexican affairs Hotchkiss could not be arrested and turned over to the American authorities.

Instead of entering Canada as Polktown people thought probable, and from which he could be more or less easily extradited if found, Tom Hotchkiss had traveled across the continent to be near battle-troubled Mexico where many transgressors against laws of the United States have taken refuge.

Janice Day's heart throbbed with eager thoughts. What a really great thing it would be if she and Marty could succeed in having this man, whose dis-

honest acts threatened Uncle Jason's ruin, apprehended by the law before he could get across the Border!

"Oh! if daddy's friend, Lieutenant Cowan, were only here," thought the girl, "we might accomplish it without awaiting the return of Rosita's trousers-chasing 'hoosban'.' I wonder who is in command of the soldiers out there at the post? Would I dare go to see?"

This plan savored of delaying her determination to get into Mexico and find her wounded father. But to cause the arrest of Tom Hotchkiss might mean Uncle Jason's financial salvation. Of course, if the runaway storekeeper had not lost the money he had stolen, his apprehension would insure the recovery of the large sum for which Mr. Jason Day had made himself liable.

Janice waved her hand in return to Marty and nodded understandingly; but she wished to communicate with him at close quarters. She desired to know how much he had learned—if he, too, knew that the local sheriff was out of town. She however saw the danger of going down boldly to hold converse with her cousin. Tom Hotchkiss knew her, of course, as he did Marty, though not very well. Just then Janice hoped the man had forgotten them both.

When Rosita, smiling but puffing after the stair-climb like the exhaust of a "mountain climber"

locomotive, appeared for her tray Janice took the willing and kindly Mexican woman into her confidence, to an end she had in view.

It was true that Janice's traveling bag held a very small wardrobe for such a long journey as she had made. She had nothing fit to wear now that she had reached the Border. Could ready-made garments that would fit her be bought in Don José's store?

But, by goodness!—yes, huh? There were garments for the young señorita—yes, of a delectable assortment. Ah! if Rosita herself could but wear them. But, she was past all that—yes, huh? Would the señorita believe it? She had lost her figure!

Janice turned quickly to point from the window so that the unfortunate Rosita should not see her expression. It was a task to keep from bursting into laughter in the simple woman's face.

"Clothes like that girl over there is wearing?" Janice asked.

"Ah, señorita! not like those old clothes of Manuel Dario's daughter. But real *tailaire-made* gowns from the East."

"But I wish to dress like one of you Mexican girls," Janice said with subtile flattery. "My cousin and I have to go over into your country and I shall be less conspicuous if I dress like—like other girls there, shall I not?"

"Oh! but not like the common girl!" begged Rosita. "One must dress richly, señorita."

"No," Janice said. "I am on a serious mission, Rosita; perhaps a dangerous mission. My father has been wounded in a fight up beyond San Cristoval, and I must go after him and bring him over here."

Rosita made a clucking noise in her throat significant of her sympathy, making likewise the sign of the cross. "May his recovery be sure and speedy, señorita," she said. "Yes, huh?"

But now for the new clothes. Once having got it fixed in her slow brain that Janice was not in the market for the shop-made garments copied after the latest fashions, Rosita was very helpful. She made no objection to waddling downstairs and panting up again with her arms full of the ordinary cheap finery of the Mexican women. The colors were gay and the goods coarse; but Janice was not critical. She merely hoped to escape any special attention while passing through these Border towns. Likewise she hoped to disguise herself from the eyes of Mr. Tom Hotchkiss.

"If the señorita desires to travel far within Chihuahua, it would be better to advise with my father, Don José," Rosita said, revealing a relationship Janice had not before suspected. "Although he has been exiled now for many years, and is—what you say?—naturalized—yes, huh. Yet, señorita, he has many friends among all factions. Some of the lesser chiefs are personally known to him, those both

of the bandits and the army of deliverance. Speak to him, señorita."

"I shall, Rosita," said Janice. "And as soon as your husband, the Señor Sheriff Morales, comes I wish to speak with him too."

"*Sí, sí, señorita.* I hope that will be soon," Rosita said, blowing a sigh. "And I hope he brings back Uncle Tio's pants."

Janice ventured downstairs dressed in her fresh garments. They were not unbecoming, and she tossed her head and walked with her hand on her hip as she had seen several of the Mexican girls do who had passed Marty leaning against the wall. Marty was not thinking much of girls, however, and he had given the señoritas very little notice for their trouble.

But he saw Janice when she came down the veranda steps and recognized her, grinning broadly at her.

"Hi tunket! you got a head on you, Janice, you have!" he said admiringly. "I wasn't sure you'd see what I was up to."

"I return the compliment," said his cousin, smiling on him. "*You* thought of it first."

"Well, I was afraid Tom Hotchkiss might see and spot me."

"He is still in the store. I heard and recognized his voice as I came down. I think he is bargaining for something with Señor José Almoreda Tomas

Sauceda Pez. Perhaps Hotchkiss is going to adopt Mexican garments," she went on after she and Marty had giggled over their host's name.

"Good-bye to that red vest, then," grunted Marty. "Now, we've just got to catch that feller and shut him up somewhere till dad can send for him. There ain't any police here. I asked the feller I swapped my clothes with."

"Oh, Marty! did you get rid of all your good clothes—your Sunday suit?"

"Why," said Marty slowly, "I got something to boot. I didn't make such a bad bargain. Anyway, the feller I swapped with said he needed the pants awful bad."

"What for?" gasped Janice.

"Why, for somebody he called Uncle Tio. Uncle Tio's lost his—had 'em stole. I judge nobody down here ever owns more than one pair of pants at a time, and they would have hung this feller that stole Uncle Tio's if they'd caught him. 'Tisn't horse thieves they lynch down here in the Southwest; it's pants thieves!" and Marty chuckled.

"Oh, Marty!" giggled Janice. "The whole police force has gone chasing the robber who got Uncle Tio's trousers."

"Thought there weren't any police?" gasped Marty.

Janice told him about Rosita's husband.

"A sheriff, eh?" said Marty. "We'll get him

to grab and hold on to Tom Hotchkiss—sure. Wonder if there's a calaboose here?"

"There must be some way of holding the man. Did you communicate with Lieutenant Cowan, Marty?"

The boy wagged his head regretfully. "Nobody knows where he is. They tell me at the telegraph office that the army is on a war basis and information about the movements of troops is not locally given out. We got to go on our own taps, I guess, Janice."

"But, Marty, I don't know what to do. About this Tom Hotchkiss, I mean."

"I know. You're mighty anxious to make the crossing and go up to Uncle Brocky's mine. So am I. But we got to grab Tom Hotchkiss first."

"If we can."

"I told dad we would," Marty said confidently. "Oh! we'll fix it. But I wish there was a constable here right now. I don't know about these sheriffs. Still, it's against the law down here to carry a gun, I s'pose, same as it is up North, unless you're a soldier or a law officer. That's why that feller that swapped clothes with me said there were no cops to bother about it."

"Why! what do you mean, Marty?" his cousin cried.

The boy drew from its hiding place in his sash a shiny "snub-nose" service revolver—a much more

deadly weapon than the army automatic, for it will shoot farther and straighter.

"This is what I got to boot in the trade," said the boy with immense pride.

"Marty!" almost shrieked Janice. "You'll shoot yourself!"

"I won't till it's loaded," returned her cousin coolly. "I got the cartridges, all right all right; but I haven't put any of 'em into the cylinder. Oh, I know about guns, Janice."

"Goodness me!" groaned the girl. "What *are* we coming to?"

"We've *come*," announced Marty grimly. "And it ain't any Sunday-school picnic at that. This isn't Polktown, Janice. We're at the Border. 'Tisn't no place for scare-cats, either."

"I'm no 'scare-cat,' as you call them, I should hope," said the girl indignantly.

Nevertheless she was very much disturbed by this incident. It seemed so peaceful here; they had seen scarcely a soldier in crossing Texas—none at all since leaving the train. The fact that they were so near the border-line of war-ridden Mexico was now suddenly impressed upon her mind.

"Suppose Marty should be shot?" she thought. "Oh! what would Uncle Jason and Aunt 'Mira do to me?"

"Say!" the boy suddenly interrupted the train of these thoughts and with cheerfulness. "Say!

it's up to us to do something. Let's get that old don out of the store and put it to him—straight. They tell me he's the whole cheese here."

"He seems kindly disposed," Janice agreed.

"He was a high muck-a-muck in Chihuahua once upon a time. But he favored the poor people—peons, they call 'em—and old Diaz who used to boss the whole o' Mexico run him out. I guess he's one good greaser that ain't dead," and the boy grinned.

"Oh, Marty!"

"Well, maybe he can help. And if his son-in-law is sheriff——"

At that moment Don José walked out upon the porch and seated himself in his broad armchair.

"Come on," said Marty, seizing his cousin's hand.

They approached the hotel veranda. This time the proprietor did not rise to greet them. He scarcely looked at them, in truth.

But when Marty spoke Don José started upright in his chair and stared—then arose.

"By goodness! it is so!" he exclaimed. "Pardon! I did not recognize. It is, then, that you have assumed the dress of my countrymen?"

"We have to go over into Mexico and we thought it would be better if we dressed in this way," Janice explained.

"It is so," agreed the old gentleman, nodding vigorously. "And when would you go?"

"As soon as possible. But there is something——"

"Manuel is going this evening with an empty wagon," the don said. "He will take you to La Guarda for five dollars each."

"Five dollars Mex?" put in Marty shrewdly.

"But, yes."

"Oh! but how about Tom Hotchkiss——" broke in Janice.

"That feller in the red vest—the American talking with you in the store, Don José?" questioned Marty. "We want to talk to you about him."

"You know heem?" cried the old man amazedly. "Why did you not speak to heem, then? He is gone."

"Gone!" chorused the cousins.

"I sorrow to tell you—yes. He is gone this half hour. He was bargaining for my best horse, and he went out through my stables in the rear. He is already at the crossing by now. *Sí, señorita.* I am sure your friend—Señor Hoo-kiss, is he called?—did not see you."

Janice and Marty glanced at each other. The boy, first to find his voice, muttered:

"Of all the gooneys that ever got away from the backwoods, *we* take the bun!"

"The señorita is greatly disappoint?" queried the kind old man. "Señor Hoo-kiss has gone to La Guarda. If the señorita and her *compadre,*" and he

smiled at Marty, "go there she may overtake *los Americanos*, eh? The boy, Manuel, is to be trusted."

"We might's well go, Janice," groaned Marty. "No use even waitin' for dad to answer my telegram. It's all off about Tom Hotchkiss."

"Oh! poor Uncle Jason!" murmured Janice.

"We'll take a ride with Manuel, Don José," said Marty briskly. "And can you get us a good supper before we start?"

"I will have a chicken killed, señor," said the old man, going indoors to give the order.

"Cricky! Chicken right off the hoof," groaned Marty. "Unless they pound it like they say they do the boarding-house beefsteak, that pullet will sure be tough."

"Rosita is a good cook," Janice assured him wearily.

"She's bound to be," grinned Marty. "'Twasn't wind-pudding that made her as fat as she is, I bet."

They tried not to show each other how disappointed they were over the escape of Tom Hotchkiss. They had found him and lost him so easily! It was positive that the absconding storekeeper did not know of the presence of the cousins here; yet chance had sent him on his way before they could have the man apprehended for the swindle he had worked in Polktown. However, this misadventure made Janice's principal object in coming to the

Border loom more significantly in her thoughts. She must reach San Cristoval and the Alderdice Mine as quickly as possible.

While supper was being prepared and the two cousins waited for the teamster, Manuel, Janice talked with Don José, who was a very intelligent person indeed. He assured her that, if the journey to San Cristoval was possible at all, it could be made from La Guarda on the other side of the river as directly as from any place.

He went so far as to write a letter in Spanish, which he carefully translated for Janice's benefit, to the *cacique,* or mayor, really the "feudal lord" of La Guarda, asking his good offices for "my very good friends," as he politely called Janice and Marty.

"He will advise you regarding route, conveyance, and payment for services," Don José said. "*Sí, sí!* you have the money to pay? *Poderoso Caballero es Don Dinero*—a powerful gentleman is Mr. Money, señorita."

The two hurried their departure. At least, Janice and Marty hurried their preparations for leaving Don José's establishment; but nobody else hurried.

Manuel hitched in his four mules after a while. Then he ate his supper. Half an hour was consumed in picking his teeth and gossiping with Rosita.

"Hi! señor and señorita!" he finally shouted. "*Los Americanos!* We go—alla right?"

The wagon was merely a platform of split poles laid over the axletrees of the two pair of wheels, connected by a reach. But Marty, mindful of his cousin's comfort, had bought a bundle of thatch for a seat.

She climbed on and Marty followed. Manuel sat sidewise on the tongue just behind the mules' heels. He shouted to the animals in Spanish, and the mules were off.

It was a dusty drive to the river, but comparatively cool at this time of day. The cousins did not see the red vest of Tom Hotchkiss on the way. He had doubtless got over the river before them.

It was nine o'clock when the mules splashed down into the ford. Manuel drew up his feet carefully, so as not to get them wet, although he was barefooted.

"If they got washed he'd die of the shock," whispered Marty to Janice.

In one place the mules were body deep in the yellow, sluggish flood. Janice and Marty stood up; but the water did not rise over the platform of the wagon. In a few minutes Manuel shouted again to the mules and they fought their way up the Mexican bank.

"*Viva Méjico!*" ejaculated Manuel.

"What's that for?" asked Marty suspiciously.

"We haf arrived," said the teamster. "And whoever hears us," he added, squinting about in the dusk, "will know we love *la patria.*"

CHAPTER XX

ROWELED BY CIRCUMSTANCES

For the first time since, long before, Janice had accused Nelson Haley of taking his duties non-seriously, the Polktown School Committee was not getting full measure of the young master's attention.

The school work slipped along in its usual groove; but Nelson's mind was not fixed upon it. Indeed, his waking thoughts—even his dream fancies—were flying across the continent with Janice Day toward the Mexican Border.

The shock of learning of Janice's departure on her mission thoroughly awoke Nelson. He blamed himself for not accompanying the girl. What must she think of him? And he had not even believed her courageous enough to start alone when she had warned him of her intention!

"I was a dunce," he repeated over and over again. "I should know that Janice always says just what she means, means what she says, and, as Walky Dexter puts it, has more fighting pluck than a barrel of bobcats!"

Walky's tongue was the busiest of any in Polktown during the first few days following the de-

parture of Janice and Marty Day. He was not above saying "I told you so!" to any and all who would listen to him.

He claimed to have foreseen all along Janice's intention of going to her wounded father; but he admitted that Marty had fooled him.

"Jefers-pelters! who'd ha' thought that freckled-faced kid would have sneaked out after his cousin and got the reach on all us older fellers that 'ud ha' been only too glad ter go in his stead? Sure, you'd ha' gone with Janice. I'd ha' gone myself—if my wife would ha' let me. Haw! haw! haw! But there warn't no wife ter stop *you* from goin', Frank."

This was addressed to Frank Bowman, who had been out of town for some days and had returned to find all the neighbors vastly excited over the runaways.

"No; I have no wife. But I suppose objections might be filed if I had undertaken to go with Janice," the civil engineer said grimly. "But Marty's with her."

"Jefers-pelters! ain't he jest the greatest kid? But he's *only* a kid," added Mr. Dexter.

"Who has gone after them?" demanded Frank.

"Huh? What ye talkin' 'beout? You expect anybody could bring 'em back once they got free and foot-loose?"

"But isn't Mr. Day going on to be with them at the Border?"

"Jase? Great jumpin' bobcats! how you talk!"

"Why not?"

"I calculate Jase has got about all he can 'tend to financially lookin' out for them notes he indorsed for Tom Hotchkiss. Tom left him holdin' the bag, ye know—er—haw! haw! haw!"

"I see. No money to go with, eh?"

"That's it—if nothin' more," agreed Walky.

Frank said nothing to the town expressman about having lent Marty Day the money that the boy had evidently needed to pay his traveling expenses. Marty certainly could not be blamed. He had shown himself wiser regarding Janice and her intentions than the older folk. Marty may have handled the matter in a boyish way; but Frank Bowman did not feel like blaming his young friend.

He went up Hillside Avenue to the Day house that evening and found Nelson Haley there before him. The schoolmaster showed a surface placidity which was really no criterion of his inner feelings.

"Well, what's going to be done about it?" demanded Frank, as soon as he had pulled off his coat.

Uncle Jason passed him a yellow sheet of paper —a telegram. It had been brought over on the *Constance Colfax* that afternoon from the Landing. It was the night letter Marty had sent soon after leaving Chicago—a short night letter at that:

"I got my eye on Janice. She is all right so far."

"Why, he isn't really with her, after all!" said Frank.

"Oh, but they air together, Mr. Bowman," cried Aunt 'Mira. "My min's much relieved. I didn't know but Marty had run away to kill Indians, or be a pirate, or sich, like they do in books."

"Boys don't do that even in books, nowadays, Mrs. Day," Nelson told her. "They run away from home to become jitney bus drivers, or movie actors. Indians and pirates are out of date."

"You can poke fun," smiled the woman; "but if he's with Janice he's all right."

Frank Bowman had read the telegram a second time.

"It's not altogether sure in my mind," he said in a voice too low for Mrs. Day to hear as she bustled about the kitchen, "that Marty is really with Janice. He wasn't when he sent this message at least."

"Ain't that a fac'?" exclaimed Mr. Day. "Seems like he is jest a-watchin' of her."

"For fear she'd try to send him home if he revealed his presence," was Nelson's shrewd observation.

"You're mighty right, Haley," the civil engineer agreed. "That's what he's doing."

"Wal," Mr. Day sighed, "he's near her if anything should happen so's he could be useful. But I ain't easy in my mind. A gal like her dependin' on a boy like him——"

"I don't suppose you could find it possible to go down there yourself, Mr. Day?" suggested Frank. "Even if we could find out just where they were heading for?"

"I snum! I dunno how I could," groaned Mr. Day. "It'd seem fair impossible. I tell you frankly, boys, Tom Hotchkiss has left me flat. The elder—bless his hide, for he was never knowed to do sech a thing afore—has offered to take up the fust note I indorsed for Tom, and which is now due. Otherwise I should be holdin' a auction, I guess. I'm in bad shape."

"It's too bad, Mr. Day," sighed Nelson. "Is the bank going to press you for every cent?"

"They ain't feeling so friendly as they did at fust," Uncle Jason admitted. "At fust it was hoped that something might be recovered from the stock in the store and the fixtures. But Tom Hotchkiss was thorough; ye gotter give him credit for that. He'd what they call hypothecated every stitch, and we couldn't even tetch the money in the till—no, sir!"

"Too bad," mused Nelson.

"He *was* a rascal!" exclaimed Frank.

"He was shrewd," admitted Uncle Jason. "An' as nice spoken an' palaverin' a cuss as ever I see."

"Sh! Jason! don't swear that-a-way—an' you a perfessin' member."

"Wal, no use cryin' over the cream the cat licked

off'n the top of the pan—it's gone," groaned Uncle Jason. "And *he's* gone. They tell me the detecatifs the Bankers' Association put on his track can't find hide nor hair of him up toward Canady.

"An' then," Uncle Jason went on to say, "the bank people hev l'arned a thing or two that didn't please 'em. Of course, 'tain't none o' their business, but they'd seen Janice scurryin' around Middletown in that little car o' hern and they got it fixed in their heads we Days must be mighty well off."

"Reflected glory, eh?" suggested Nelson.

"Dunno about the glory part," sniffed Uncle Jason. "But I have an idee they thought I had so much money I could put my hand right in my pocket and pay these notes of Tom's in a bunch. They are all call notes, of course. And the bank is tryin' to make the court order me to take 'em up at once."

"That is not a very neighborly thing to do," said Frank.

"They seem to be afraid if I'm given time I'll try to cover up some o' my assets. I snum! when a man's in difficulties with one o' these banks his past repertation for honesty don't amount to shucks—no, sir!"

But the main topic of conversation on this evening was the journey of Janice and Marty. What were they doing at this very moment? Where were they on the railroad train? For what point on the Border were they aiming?

Frank figured out, from the date and sending point of the telegram, the probable route of the absent ones to the Mexican line. Yet they could not be sure of even this. Not knowing on what train Janice and Marty traveled, it was impossible to send an answer to Marty's telegram.

"In all probability, however," Frank explained, "El Paso is their ultimate destination, or some town of that string along the Rio Grande touched by the Texas-Pacific. San Cristoval is to be reached more directly from that locality than in any other way, now that the Mexican International is out of commission."

"Oh! don't say they'll really get into Mexico, Mr. Bowman!" cried Aunt 'Mira, who had come into the sitting room now. "They won't be let, will they?"

"Almiry's got the idee," said Mr. Day, "that there's a file of sojers with fixed bayonets standin' all along the aidge of that Rio Grande River, keepin' folks from crossin' over."

"You'd find such a guard at El Paso bridge, all right," Frank said. "But there are plenty of places where the river can be forded, unless raised by infrequent floods. Those who wish to, go back and forth into Mexican territory as they please—no doubt of that."

"But Janice and Marty won't know nothing about *that!*" cried Mrs. Day.

"Trust Marty for finding out anything he needs to know," put in Nelson, yet with a gloomy air.

"You're right there," Frank added. "He isn't tongue-tied."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Aunt 'Mira. "I don't know as shooting Indians or turning pirate would be much worse. They say them Mexicaners *do* shoot people."

"I snum, yes!" ejaculated Mr. Day. "They shot Broxton, didn't they?"

"Oh! you don't s'pose they've got a grudge against the Days, do ye?" cried the anxious woman. "Maybe they'll act jest as mean as they kin toward any of our fambly."

"No, I do not believe that, Mrs. Day," Nelson hastened to assure her. "Janice and Marty will be in no more danger down there than any other Americans. Only——"

"Only what, Mr. Haley?" asked Aunt 'Mira.

"They shouldn't be there alone. Somebody should be with them," said the schoolmaster desperately.

"Ain't that the trewth?" cried Aunt 'Mira. "I wish I was with 'em myself. I read in the *Fireside Fav'rite* that 'tain't considered a proper caper, anyway, for a young gal to go anywhere much alone without a chaperon."

At this moment there came a rap upon the side porch door. Aunt 'Mira rose to respond, and as she went into the little boxlike hall she failed to quite

close the sitting room door. Therefore the trio left behind heard plainly the following dialogue:

"Miz' Scattergood! I declare, how flustered you look. Come in—do."

"No wonder I'm flustered. I—I—— No, I won't come no farther than the hall, Miz' Day. I'll tell ye here."

"Oh! what is it?" gasped Aunt 'Mira. "Nothin's happened to 'Rill?"

"That's jest what it is. Oh, Miz' Day, I'm an ol' fool!"

The fact that Mrs. Scattergood was frankly weeping was what held the trio of men in the sitting room silent.

"What you done now?" demanded Aunt 'Mira with a grimness that seemed to point to her special knowledge of her visitor's foolishness on previous occasions. "I told her the trewth——"

"My soul an' body, Miz' Scattergood, the trewth in your hands is jest as dangerous as a loaded gun. What did you tell her?"

"'Bout Janice. Hopewell had been keeping it from her—that Janice had gone away, ye know. Gone away to Mexico, I mean. And when I told her it scart her so—— I come right over for you, Miz' Day. You're sech a master-hand when a body's sick."

"Dr. Poole been there?"

"Yes. An' he's afeard——"

"You wait jest a minute," said Mrs. Day. "I'll put on somethin' an' go with ye. But 'tis my opinion, Sarah Scattergood, that you oughter wear a muzzle!"

The heavy woman bustled about for her things without saying a word to her husband and the young men until she was ready for departure.

"I'm going over to Hopewell Drugg's, Jase. You'll hafter git along as best you kin till I come back. There's bread in the breadbox an' a whole jar of doughnuts. Be sure an' keep the butt'ry door shut and put out the cat. There's suet tryin' out in the oven—don't fergit it when ye make the fire in the mornin'. Maybe I'll be back by mornin'; but Rill's took a bad turn an' I shell stay if I'm needed. Goo' night, Mr. Haley. Goo' night, Mr. Bowman."

She went out, following the birdlike Mrs. Scattergood. Soon after Nelson and Frank strolled down Hillside Avenue together. Frank had been as silent as the schoolmaster for some time. At last he said:

"When will you start?"

Nelson jumped. His face flushed and then paled and he stared with darkening eyes into his companion's countenance.

"You—you're a mind reader," he said at last, trying to laugh.

"I only know what *I'd* do if I were in your shoes," the civil engineer said. "I know how you

feel. I couldn't bear it as well as you have if my—— Well, if anybody belonging to me as Janice does to you, Haley, were taking such a trip."

Nelson groaned. "I don't know what to do. The School Committee will raise a row——"

"Let 'em," Frank said briskly. "You're making it harder for yourself to go by thinking of your duties here. Cut loose! If you went to the hospital with a broken leg they'd have to get along without you. This is a whole lot more important than a broken leg."

"You're right!" groaned Nelson, who felt himself roweled by circumstances. "I must go."

"When?"

"It will have to be after the bank opens to-morrow."

"You'll go from Middletown, then? I'll see if I can get you transportation for part of the way to Chicago at least. You're a member of my family," and Frank grinned.

"That's awfully good of you," responded Nelson.

"And say!"

"What is it?" asked the schoolmaster.

"How are you fixed financially? I can put my hands on a little more money. You see, I expect it is on some of my money that Marty got away."

"What do you mean?"

"I lent him most of the money I had about me," confessed Frank. "I didn't know what he wanted

it for—the young rascal! But if you need more than you have handy——"

"Thanks ever so much, Bowman; but I've quite a little saved up now. I sha'n't need such help as *that.*"

They parted on the corner and Nelson went home to Mrs. Beaseley's to write his resignation from the situation of principal of the Polktown school. He was very sure that to leave the school board in the lurch in this way, with less than twenty-four hours' notice, would terminate his engagement in this school for all time.

"But I must go after Janice—I *must!*" he thought, tossing wakefully in his bed. "I can wait no longer."

CHAPTER XXI

AT LA GUARDA

JANICE and Marty, clinging together on the rough platform of Manuel's wagon for fear of falling off, saw very little of the country through which they traveled that evening. That the way was rough they knew, and that sparse trees bordered it on either hand was likewise apparent even in the dusk. But they saw no habitations and no light save the distant stars.

The mules rattled on at a jog-trot, while Manuel beguiled the way with untranslatable songs in the vernacular. If Marty asked him a question about the way or the distance or the time, all Manuel said was:

"We reech there preety soon, *hombre*—alla right!"

By and by they did espy lights ahead. It was then almost midnight. A group of horsemen arose suddenly like shadows out of the mesquite and hailed the driver.

"*Viva Méjico!*" squalled Manuel before he could pull his mules to a standstill.

A sharp demand in Spanish made Janice cower in

her place on the reach and cling more tightly to Marty's hand. They listened to Manuel chattering a reply in which was included Don José's name. In a moment they were driving on, undisturbed.

"That chief, huh! *he* know the good Don José," Manuel said to his passengers.

"Suppose he had *not* known him?" drawled Marty in the semi-gloom.

They could see that Manuel shrugged his shoulders; but he made no other reply.

The twinkling lights of La Guarda were now near at hand. They were not halted but rattled into the sprawling little town and on to a large, square, low building, the entrance to which was a wide and dimly lighted archway.

"Hi tunket!" breathed Marty. "It looks like a police station. D'you s'pose we're going to be pinched, Janice?"

But he grinned as he asked the question and got down nonchalantly enough, to help his cousin alight.

"Not much like the calaboose at Middletown," he observed.

"You horrid boy!" Janice said. "Are you trying to scare me?"

"Couldn't do it," declared Marty with admiration. "You're a reg'lar feller, Janice."

"Thank you, dear. I know you mean to compliment me. Now, what is Manuel doing?"

The teamster had called some question into the empty archway of the building, repeating it several times. There now appeared a little, shrewd-looking Spaniard without a spear of hair on either head or face, and wearing a flapping gown over what was plainly his pajamas.

Manuel and this apparition gabbled in their own tongue for several minutes; then the teamster gestured toward the bald man, saying to Marty:

"Señor Don Abreguardo. He will tak' you in—alla right. *Mi dinero, señor.*"

This was a request for payment, as Marty very well knew, so the boy handed over a five-dollar gold piece. Manuel looked at the coin suspiciously, bit it, rang it on one of the flagstones, weighed it thoughtfully in his palm, and finally pocketed it and drove off without further word.

"What do you know about that?" murmured Marty.

Janice had already turned to the old man in the flapping gown. He bowed very low to her.

"Within," he said clearly, in good English if a little stilted in diction—"within lies my poor house. We Mexicans have no word for 'home,' señorita; but *la patria* means more than country. All I possess save *la patria* lies herein. It is yours."

"Why, he is even more polite than Don José," whispered the girl as they followed the Mexican who had evidently got out of bed to attend them.

"Ye-as," Marty said slowly. "But it seems to me they offer too much."

"They are not as cautious as us Yankees," his cousin said, smiling.

"*Now* you've said a mouthful," announced the boy with emphasis.

The passage through the wall led to a roomy court around which the house was built. There was the tinkle of water falling into a basin, the fresh smell of vegetation, and by the light of the stars Janice saw that trees were growing here.

"It is late, señorita and señor. My family have retired. I will assign you both rooms and in the morning we will become acquainted—eh?" said the don. "This way, please. You are brother and sister?"

"Cousins," Janice explained.

"Ah—yes. You would not be separate far—eh? This room for you, then, señorita. The next on the right for our young señor—eh?"

Lamps burned in both rooms. They were comfortably furnished and the stone floor had rugs upon it.

"You will be undisturbed here, I assure you. In the morning, señorita, a woman will wait upon you."

He bowed and clattered away in his hard, heelless slippers.

"Seems like a good sort of a creature, after all," Marty said. "Don Abreguardo, eh?"

Janice made no reply save to bid him good-night and entered her room. She had lost that feeling of uncertainty and actual fear that had oppressed her. The future promised more cheer than she had believed possible.

Those back in Polktown had been entirely wrong. Her own judgment seemed to have been the sounder. Here she was, over the Border, miles on the way to her wounded father!

"And everybody so kind!" she thought as she sank to sleep on the comfortable couch under the canopy. "Only I wish we might have caused the arrest of that Tom Hotchkiss."

It seemed to the weary girl as though she closed her eyes and opened them immediately upon the broad sunshine and the tinkling fountain in the court of Don Abreguardo's dwelling. She heard Marty's voice and that of their host outside.

Janice arose and found herself well rested after her repose. She drew the lattices at the window and their clatter aroused something else.

Just inside her closed door, leaning against the wall, was something she had not before noticed. It looked like a bag of old clothes covered by a purple *serape*. This began to move, quite startling the girl for an instant.

The *serape* was put aside languidly and a bare brown arm appeared. Janice retreated to the other side of the canopied bed and watched. A girl's head

was revealed—lank, black hair, a very dark face with high cheek bones, bead-black eyes, and huge silver rings hanging in the lobes of her ears, fairly touching her bared shoulders.

"What do you want here?" gasped Janice.

"I am the one sent, señorita!" ejaculated the girl in English. "I help you, señorita. It is an honor." And, having risen quickly and as gracefully as a panther, she bowed.

"Oh! you are the maid?"

"*Sí, señorita!*"

Janice decided she must be an Indian—one of pure blood. There was a look about her different from that of the Mexican girls she had seen.

"What is your name?" asked the girl from the North, giving herself up to the ministrations of the maid, who seemed quite skillful.

"Luz, señorita, is what I am called. It is the little name for Lucita, señorita."

"You have worked long for Don Abreguardo?"

"I was born in the house, señorita," said the girl, with a flash of her white teeth.

"Is there a large family?" Janice asked doubtfully. "I am a stranger, you know."

"His mother lives—the ancient Donna Abreguardo. He now has his second wife, has the good don. By his first he has two daughters and a son. Young Don Ricardo is married and is at the Hacienda del Norte. The two señoritas are of the

marriageable age—oh, yes! But in these troubled times who has thought for marriage?"

"And this is all his family?"

"There are the children. Three. Of the good don's second marriage. He has his quiver full, as my people say," and the Indian maid chuckled.

She seemed so intelligent that Janice would have continued the conversation had she not heard Marty moving so impatiently about the courtyard.

"Come on, Janice!" he said as she appeared. "There's breakfast waiting—and it ain't *all* beans. I'm as hungry as a shark."

A table was laid, with covered dishes on it, near the fountain. The courtyard was a clean, comfortable place. The style of living familiar to the Abreguardos was of course entirely new to Janice and her cousin. "Luz" waited upon the guests.

Don Abreguardo came bustling into the court before they had finished the repast. Now that he was dressed, he proved to be a very dapper figure of an old gentleman, his bald poll hidden by a cap.

"This is a fine day—by goodness, yes!" he announced. "Have you attended the señorita with diligence, Luz?"

"As I would the Donna Isabella herself," declared the Indian handmaid.

"You may bring my coffee here. We will talk."

It seemed it was a coffee-making machine he desired. He was very particular about his coffee, was

Don Abreguardo—liked it black and thick and drank it without sugar or cream.

While the coffee dripped he said, bowing to Janice:

"I have read the letter from my very good friend, Don José Pez, which you so kindly gave me last night, señorita. He tells me you have need of haste in making your way to Los Companos District?"

"It is true, sir," Janice said eagerly. "My father was wounded quite three weeks ago. So we heard. Since then we have not learned a thing about him."

"He is at one mine beyond San Cristoval?"

"The Alderdice. He has been chief man there for more than three years."

"*Si, si!* I understand," said Señor Abreguardo. "There has been trouble in that vicinity, it is true. But it seems things always quiet down—even the worst."

After this more or less comforting assurance the old man sat thinking for a minute or two with lips pursed. Now and then he took sips of his first cup of coffee.

"Were your haste not what it is, señorita," he said at length, "I would urge you to remain—you and your young *compadre*—until I might send for certain news of your father. But you are anxious in your mind—by goodness, yes!"

"Oh! indeed I am," cried Janice.

"Then we must forego the pleasure of your pres-

ence here at my poor dwelling," the señor said politely. "There is a way of going soon, I believe, to San Cristoval. Carlitos Ortez goes in his gas-car—his *tin Leezie,* he call it. You know?" and their host grinned suddenly.

"Cricky! an automobile?" gasped Marty. "Just the caper!"

"*Si, sí!*" said Señor Abreguardo. "Carlitos, he swear by the *tin Leezie.* He will take you to San Cristoval if his car, it do not br-r-eak down—by goodness, yes!

"I hear," the man went on, nodding and still sipping coffee, "last evening before you arrive, señorita, Carlitos have engage to transport another traveler up country. He may take three passengers in his car as easily as one—and you will pay him twenty American dollars apiece."

"Whew!" murmured the frugal Marty. "Couldn't we buy his flivver for that and run it ourselves?"

The señor's eyes twinkled. "He would charge you double—I assure you," he said. "Carlitos is no lover of *los Americanos.* But he will do as *I* say. Besides," added the man very sensibly, "you would not know the road, and no American unattended could easily pass the bands of rovers now infesting this district."

"Sounds nice, don't it?" whispered Marty to Janice. "What say?"

"Oh, Marty! I *must* go on," said the girl.

"Sure! All right, we take you," said Marty to Señor Abreguardo.

"You will pay Carlitos Ortez half of the money before you start—pay it into *my* hands," explained the don. "And the end of your journey—San Cristoval, for he cannot go beyond that point—you will pay him the remainder and give him a paper assuring me that he has performed his part of the contract. You are thus safeguarded, and I shall have done my duty by Don José's friends," concluded Señor Abreguardo, bowing over his coffee cup.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RED VEST AGAIN

CARLITOS ORTEZ was one of those snaky-looking, black-haired peons, with a wisp of jetty mustache, who serve as the type of Mexican villains in lurid melodrama—and he had the heart of a child!

Janice might have been afraid of the quick-motioned, nervous little man had she been of a less observant nature. But she saw his eyes—deep brown, placid like a forest pool. The eyes served to make Carlitos almost handsome.

The automobile came to the archway of Señor Abreguardo's house in an hour. Janice and Marty did not meet any of the man's family. The Indian maiden, Lucita, told Janice that the ladies of the household seldom stirred from their apartments until after *siesta*.

But the don himself stood bareheaded in the sun to see them start. Carlitos had put Janice and Marty into the back of the car.

"That other *hombre*—I peek him up later. He sit weeth me," he explained.

When they got under way with a good deal of rattle and banging, Marty, jouncing against his

cousin as the car went over a stone in the road, sniffed.

"'Tin Lizzie!' He said it!" the boy growled. "This jitney's about one-candle power, isn't it? D'you s'pose there're any springs—ugh—on the contraption at all?"

"Let's not fuss," said Janice. "Think how much worse it would be if we had to ride horses—or mules. All of those I have seen have been half wild."

"Hi tunket! this flivver's wild enough, I should think," Marty declared, as the car skidded around a corner.

La Guarda was not a large town, and they were not long in getting to the edge of it. Under the shade of a low-roofed tavern a man was standing—quite a bulky man.

"There ees my other passenger," said Carlitos over his shoulder. "He of *los Americanos,* too. I theenk he go up country to buy horses. He horse trader. Sell beeg horse last night to Don Abreguardo."

Janice had seized Marty's hand and squeezed it hard. She was not listening to Carlitos, but staring at the man on the veranda of the tavern.

He wore one of the high-crowned, wide-brimmed hats of the country; but he was not otherwise dressed like the Mexicans. His waistcoat made a vivid splotch of color as he stood in the shade.

"Cricky!" gasped Marty. "Tom Hotchkiss! red vest, an' all!"

"Oh, it *is*, Marty!" agreed his cousin.

"And we can't do a thing to him!" groaned the boy. "He's gettin' farther away from the Border; afraid of being nabbed, I s'pose."

"I hope he will not recognize us."

"We'll be dummies. Keep that veil thing over your face, Janice, then he won't know you from one of these greaser girls. An' he'll take me for a Mexican, too."

"Thank you!" murmured Janice tartly, and Marty grinned teasingly.

There was no time for further planning. The automobile halted, panting, at the tavern and the man wearing the red vest came out with his bag.

Close to, he was not to be mistaken for anybody but Tom Hotchkiss, the absconding Polktown storekeeper. He was a man of girth, with short legs. His head was set low upon a pair of heavy shoulders. Indeed, he possessed little visible neck—scarcely enough on which to put a collar.

Tom Hotchkiss was of the apoplectic build to suffer in a warm climate; and the sun, even at this time of year, seemed almost tropical to these New Englanders. He had discarded none of his ordinary dress save his hat, and that looked incongruous enough with his brown cutaway coat, the red vest, gray trousers, and spats.

"He certainly *is* a hot member to look at," muttered Marty Day, as the man approached the car.

Hotchkiss stared curiously at the other passengers; but Janice hid her face with her veil and the broad brim of Marty's hat quite sheltered his freckled countenance from casual observation.

"Friends of Don Abreguardo, señor," explained Carlitos. "They go weeth us."

He cranked up again, and the automobile began to shake and quiver "like an elephant with the palsy," to quote the disgusted Marty.

"Say!" he whispered, "this isn't much like your Kremlin—believe me!"

They started. A dog got up from his bed in the dust of the road, yapped at them languidly, and lay down again in his form. The car skidded around another corner and they were immediately in the open country. Climbing a long hill the automobile seemed a dozen times on the point of being stalled; but no—she kept pluckily on to the summit.

On the down-grade beyond this rise the car went so fast—thumping and crashing over outcropping roots and other obstructions—that Janice cried out in alarm.

"If we don't meet nothin' we're all right—eh?" shouted Carlitos above the roar of the car. "The brake, she done bust."

"Huh!" muttered Marty. "One thing sure, we can go as fast as this old 'tin Lizzie' can."

This did not sound altogether reassuring to Janice. She unlatched the door on her side of the tonneau, ready to jump out if it looked as though the reckless driver was about to bring them to disaster.

The man in the red vest hung on to the side, and, short as his neck was, the two passengers in the tonneau could see that roll of fat above the collar of his shirt turning pale!

"Tom's getting white around the gills," whispered Marty to his cousin, chuckling. "He frightens easy. I wonder if we could scare him into giving up that *cash* and helping dad?"

"But—but he surely ha-hasn't all that mo-money with him," was jounced out of Janice's lips in a staccato whisper.

"He ain't forgot where he put it nor how to get hold of it again, you bet!" growled Marty. "Hi tunket! this sun ought to sweat it out of him. Ain't it hot?"

"And dusty," sighed Janice. "Oh, thank goodness! here's the bottom of the hill."

Carlitos grinned back at them—the smile of a wolf, but with his kind eyes twinkling.

"How you do, eh? The señorita not like such traveling—by goodness, no?" he said. "But if we travel not fast on the—what you call?—down-grade, we not travel far, perhaps, yes?"

Janice covered her countenance and made no

reply, for the startled face of Hotchkiss was likewise turned back.

"You don't have to go so fast on *my* account," he snarled. "I got all the time there is."

"Cricky!" whispered Marty. "I'd like to hear him say that after the judge and jury get through with him. He ought to get *life* for what he's done."

"Sh!" begged Janice. "It will do no good to quarrel with him here."

They rattled on through a pleasant valley, with here and there a bunch of cattle or horses grazing. Occasionally a *vaquero* dashed past and waved his hand in greeting to Carlitos Ortez. The latter seemed to fall into a gloomy mood and for two hours did not speak.

Then he stopped the car beside a well at the edge of the chaparral and there in the shade the passengers alighted, while Carlitos filled his radiator and tinkered with parts of the machine that seemed to need attention.

Janice and Marty managed to keep away from Tom Hotchkiss and spoke only in low tones. Perhaps the man with the red vest believed his fellow-passengers to be Mexicans, like Carlitos.

"Who owns all this land?" Hotchkiss asked.

Carlitos jerked his head out from under the car where he had been fumbling, and scowled.

"By the right of God, señor, *I* own part of it. All of *Méjico* is ours—the people's. We own. But the

reech and the strong have taken away our lands—by goodness, yes!"

"Well, you haven't got anything on folks everywhere," declared Hotchkiss. "The strong and the shrewd get it all—you bet!"

"This," and Carlitos swept a gesture including all the valley, "is the *ranchero* of Señor Baldasso Nunez. He is a buzzard."

"Yes?"

"His father was a buzzard before him—the old señor. Look you!" cried Carlitos with growing excitement. "My grandfather was a boy in the old señor's time. He is past eighty now and still working for the present Señor Baldasso."

"A long while to keep one job," said Hotchkiss.

"Listen, señor! At sixteen my grandfather was a big, fine, strong man—like *me*. He wish to marry a certain girl—she is my grandmother. Well! It is so that the old señor hear about my grandfather's wish—by goodness, yes! He send to my grandfather and offer a hundred pesos so he may pay the priest for to marry him and my grandfather accept, señor."

"That was mighty neighborly of the señor," observed the Yankee storekeeper.

"Yes-s?" hissed Carlitos. "One hundred pesos, mind—and the Church take all of that. Between the church and the landowners we are ground to powder!

"Mind you, señor, it was for becoming man and wife, and for the raising of seven sons and daughters and, now, of over thirty of *my* generation. My grandfather and all the men and boys living of his race, save me and a brother who is with the raiders. are still working for Señor Baldasso to pay off that hundred pesos!

"What you think of that, señor, huh?"

"Aw—that don't seem sensible," said Hotchkiss. "Haven't you paid the original debt?"

"*Sí*, señor! that is the truth. Always are we kep' in debt to Señor Baldasso. *Me*, I get out—turn outlaw you say—buy this 'tin Leezie'—mak' money plenty. But none of it go to that Señor Baldasso—by goodness, no!"

"So you aren't helping pay off the family debt?" drawled Hotchkiss.

"No, señor. Sometime I hope to," said Carlitos grimly.

"Yes?"

"At once. All of a piece. You understand?"

"You mean you're going to make money enough to close the account with the old man?"

"Not money," and Carlitos smiled his wolf-like smile again. "I hope to help hang Señor Baldasso at the door of his own *hacienda*—by goodness, yes!"

Marty exploded a mighty "Cricky!" Then he asked: "Is *that* why you Mexicans are fighting all the time?"

"To get back our land—our own. To govern ourselves. *Sí,* señor," Carlitos declared eagerly. "We long for a deliverer—a devoted leader who will free us from taskmasters both native and foreign. But we desire no foreign intervention—by goodness, no! Hands off, gringos. I weesh that Rio Grande," he concluded, pointing into the northeastern distance, "were ten thousand miles wide."

"Heh!" ejaculated Tom Hotchkiss, peering in the direction Carlitos pointed. "Is *that* the river —just over there?"

"It is five miles away, señor."

"But I thought you were taking me away from the river all this time?" sputtered the other. "Why! that's the Border, isn't it?"

"But yes, señor. We have to follow the road. I cannot drive the tin Leezie through the chaparral."

"I don't like it," muttered the man. "I thought we were already a long way from the States."

Marty nudged his cousin. "Scart as he can be, Janice," he whispered. "'By goodness, yes!' I believe if we had the time, we could march old Red Vest back over the Border and clap him into jail!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BANDITS

THE party got under way once more, Carlitos again silent and, Janice thought, Tom Hotchkiss eyeing her and Marty from time to time suspiciously. The fugitive had discovered that the couple in the back of the car were not Mexicans, and Hotchkiss was suspicious of all Americans. Indeed, he was living a very uneasy existence. Being naturally of a cowardly nature, even the distance he had put between himself and Polktown did not seem to his mind great enough to insure safety. The fact that, although they had been four hours on the road from La Guarda to San Cristoval, they were only five miles from the Rio Grande, greatly excited him.

Had their errand to San Cristoval and beyond not been so pressing, Janice and Marty might have conspired with Carlitos to get the swindling storekeeper back over the Border at some point where an American law officer could be found.

Janice believed she could do this. She was feeling much more certain of herself than she had on the train. Two days at the Border had made a great change in Janice Day. Marty was not the only in-

dependent one. The girl felt that, after all, the world outside her heretofore sheltered life was not so very difficult.

Thus far she had met nothing but kindness from people whom she had not expected to be kind. The way to her father seemed to be wide open before her. She was going to accomplish her mission without an iota of the trouble she had feared.

However, as this was not the time to make the attempt to bring Hotchkiss to justice she pulled the veil closer over her face and avoided the man's eyes when he chanced to look back. She hoped the fellow was just worried. Of course, being a thief and a swindler, he was suspicious of everybody. He showed very plainly that he distrusted even Carlitos. The Mexican, however, seemed in a cheerful mood again. His outbreak against the "buzzard," Señor Baldasso Nunez, must have relieved his mind.

They rattled up hill and down dale. Don Abreguardo's handmaid had put a basket of lunch into the car. At another well they stopped and ate this, Janice offering some to Carlitos and to his fat and perspiring seat mate.

"But yes, señorita," Carlitos said politely. "We do not reach La Gloria till sunset. Then we eat at Tomas Lopez's hotel. Fine hotel—by goodness, yes!"

"Why didn't you tell me it was so far?" grum-

bled Tom Hotchkiss. "I would have brought something along to eat."

Carlitos shrugged his shoulders. "I forget," he said. "Me, I have plent' tobac' for roll cigareet; what more any *hombre* need, I see not!"

They went on, passing through a village now and then. Having turned now directly from the river, Tom Hotchkiss seemed in a better mood. He commented frankly upon the miserable habitations and the miserable people he saw.

"I don't see what they get out of it," he observed. "Filthy rags to clothe them, nothing to eat but beans, and most of the houses no better than pigstys. Why! even the chickens—look at 'em, will you? They ain't fit to eat, they're so scrawny."

"They are not for eat, señor," said Carlitos softly. "They are for fight."

"For fighting, you mean?"

"*Sí*, señor. The Mexican may be poor, but never too poor to fight good game cock on Sunday after mass—by goodness, yes!"

In one of the villages Carlitos slowed down—then stopped. There was a group of old women squatting in the street before the door of an adobe dwelling. They swayed from side to side, moaning in unison, while now and then one would lift up her head and wail aloud.

"What is the matter with them?" demanded Janice.

Carlitos had removed his hat and crossed himself, muttering a prayer. "It is a funeral, señorita," he explained. "See! they carry heem to his grave."

Four men came forth from the house, carrying a packing case on their shoulders. This makeshift casket had stenciled on its end: "Glass. Use No Hooks." The intimation that the corpse was so fragile amused Marty.

"Hi tunket!" he murmured. "Don't these folks down here beat ev'rything you ever saw Janice?"

The old women mourners scuttled out of the way. A band of three musicians, whose instruments consisted of a cornet, a piccolo, and a drum, appeared and headed the procession. All the village fell in behind the band and the pall-bearers, two and two, and when they turned out of the main street to mount the hill toward the cemetery, Carlitos cranked up again and the car went on, leaving the funeral cortège marching blithely to the strains of a well-known Mexican air.

The wail of the cornet, the squealing of the piccolo, and the rattle of the drum accompanied the automobile out of town and a long way into the country. They began to mount into higher ground the farther they got from the river. It was almost sunset as Carlitos had prophesied when they saw La Gloria lying above them on a cheerful mesa.

The town was nearly ringed around by green trees. The main streets were paved. The plaza, or

central square, was gay with shops and there was a bandstand. Señor Tomas Lopez's hotel was about on a par with the Pez hostelry at Fort Hancock.

But after the dusty and nerve-racking ride in the automobile a chance for quiet, a bath, and relaxation between the clean coarse sheets of a bed, seemed heavenly to Janice Day. She really did not want to get up for supper.

Marty, however, kept calling to her and would not be denied. He had found out that there was beefsteak—of a sort—for supper.

"I never did realize before," he sadly admitted, "how tired a feller could get of just beans. I never want ma, when I get home again, to have 'em on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings—never! Shucks! I feel like I was turning into a bean myself. I bet if you planted me I'd sprout into a beanstalk."

They sat in the window till late in the evening and watched the people in the square. There was a band and it played some of the popular airs they were familiar with in the North. But when it essayed the native music Janice liked it better.

Old and young promenaded, the girls in bright costumes, the young *caballeros* in garments quite as gay—sashes, short velvet jackets, sombreros with cords of silver bullion, and some of them with clattering silver spurs on their heels. Here and there scuffled an Indian through the throng in a

brightly dyed *serape*. The older women sat on benches or in the arched doorways, many of them smoking big, black cigars. And the children were everywhere, but more nearly dressed than they had been at the Border. Up here on the mesa the nights were chilly.

They got out of La Gloria very early in the morning, for Carlitos assured them it would be a long day's journey to San Cristoval even if nothing happened to the automobile.

"An' me, I never know when she goin' to break down," he said with one of his disarming smiles.

Hotchkiss quarreled with the Mexican before the party got off. "How do I know where you're takin' me? I can't buy a map of the country—don't believe they ever *made* one down here. And who are these folks I'm a-travelin' with? I thought they were Mex; but I see they are white folks."

"What am *I*—nigger, huh?" demanded Carlitos. "You not lik-a travel weeth me, you pay me an' stop here. I no care."

"We won't bite you, Mister," drawled Marty, keeping well in the background, however. "What are you scared of?"

"What's your name?" growled Hotchkiss suspiciously.

"Down here it's George Washington. What's yours?" returned Marty, chuckling and backing still further away.

"Just as near Abraham Lincoln as yours is George Washington," snarled Hotchkiss.

Marty and Janice got into the car, having gone around back of it to enter from the opposite side. Hotchkiss climbed in beside the Mexican driver, still muttering about "not knowing where he was bound for."

The road was rougher than it had been the day before and much of the way it was ascending. So the automobile went slowly. The engine sputtered —and so did Tom Hotchkiss. Carlitos was sunk in sullen mood and his comments—usually addressed to the car—were in Spanish, and scarcely translatable.

Janice became exceedingly weary before the morning was half over. Riding over plowed ground in a springless cart would have been little worse than being jounced about in this automobile.

They did not rest even during *siesta*, only stopping long enough for Carlitos to mend his car with a piece of wire and what Janice supposed must be much Spanish profanity. The journey was getting on the Mexican's nerves as it was upon that of his passengers.

At certain places they were stopped by rough-looking men—some of them armed. Carlitos made his explanations in his own tongue. Tom Hotchkiss was growing visibly panic-stricken. He had doubtless been afraid of arrest on the United States

side of the Border; but the appearance of these bands of seemingly masterless vagabonds frightened the runaway storekeeper from Polktown still more.

It was mid-afternoon and the automobile was limping along through a wild valley, when above the coughing of the engine Janice heard the *rat-a-plan* of hoofbeats. She looked around earnestly, and finally spied a company of horsemen charging cross-country toward the trail the automobile was following.

"Oh! who are those?" she cried, leaning forward to place her hand on Carlitos' shoulder.

He looked up, saw the cavalcade, and jerked the steering wheel a little. They bumped into a bowlder, the car shot back, and then the engine died with an awful rattle.

"*Carramba!*" sputtered Carlitos. "We have the accident now—yes, huh?"

"But who are those men?" repeated Janice. "They see us. They are coming this way."

Carlitos stood up to look. He shrugged his shoulders.

"That is Dario Gomez riding in their lead. He is a great bandit chief, señorita. Now we are—what you call?—in for it—by goodness, yes!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SITUATION BECOMES DIFFICULT

They had halted beside a dense patch of chaparral. Carlitos had scarcely thrown his verbal bomb when Tom Hotchkiss slid out of his seat and dived into the thicket beside the narrow road like a woodchuck into its hole. No fat man ever disappeared more quickly.

Janice and Marty were too disturbed by the announcement of the automobile driver, and too startled withal, to note Hotchkiss' departure. The bandits, headed by Dario Gomez, swung into the trail and charged immediately down upon the stalled automobile.

The band consisted of nearly forty—an unusually large and important *commando,* as the Mexican banditti rove the country mostly in small parties, preying on whomever may have anything worth taking, and keeping up a desultory warfare against the troops of whatever de facto government may at the time be in power in Mexico City.

"Hi tunket!" exploded Marty. "What are we going to do now?"

Carlitos shrugged his shoulders, sat down, and began to roll the ever present cigarette. "As the young señor says, ''I tunkeet!'" quoted the Mexican. "What can we do but submeet?"

"Submit to what, Carlitos?" whispered Janice. "What is the danger from these men?"

"*Quién sabe?*" drawled the driver of the car. "We are in the hands of God, señorita."

The leader of the fierce-looking band was a man with long, waving *mustachios,* a regular piratical-looking hirsute adornment. He carried a white, ugly scar across his right cheek—evidently the memento of a more or less recent saber wound. He spoke first of all in Spanish to Carlitos while his wildly riding followers—plainly *vaqueros* all—dragged their mounts back to a dramatic halt about the stalled car, surrounding the party with a cloud of dust.

Carlitos drawled a reply and gestured toward his remaining passengers. Dario Gomez exclaimed:

"*Americanos*—and in the habit of friends? What means this?"

He spoke very good English. His eyes flashed, but his mustache lifted at the corners as though he laughed.

Marty was tongue-tied for the moment. The threatening aspect of the cavalcade and especially of Dario Gomez himself was too much for the nonchalance of the boy. Even the hidden weapon in

his sash gave him no comfort, for these "forty thieves" were all armed to the teeth.

It was a difficult situation. Carlitos evidently had no help to offer. Indeed he seemed to feel no particular responsibility, though he was not closely associated with these lusty vagabonds.

"What means this masquerade, señor and señorita?" Dario Gomez repeated.

It was Janice who stepped into the breach—and stepped from the car as well. She approached the charger ridden by the bandit chief, putting aside the veil that had half hidden her face.

"Señor," she said earnestly, "will you not help me get to my father? The car has broken down and we are still a long way from San Cristoval—are we not, Carlitos?"

"Huh? By goodness, yes!" replied the amazed driver.

"My cousin and I," pursued Janice Day, "have come across the States to find my father—from far beyond Chicago—from beyond New York. I must find him quickly, sir. He is wounded—perhaps dying! Will you help me?"

"Who is your *padre,* señorita?" Dario Gomez asked. "How was he wounded?"

"Mr. Broxton Day is my father. He is chief at the Alderdice Mine, beyond San Cristoval."

"Ah! beyond the town, you say? We have no power there, señorita. Not *now.* Old Whiskers

rules up there once again—and with a strong arm."

Janice did not know to whom he referred as "Old Whiskers"; possibly to some petty chief like himself. She remembered the name of a rebel leader who had been her father's friend in the past and she urged:

"I am sure my father would not have been attacked at all had Señor Juan Dicampa been still alive. He was my father's friend."

"Ha! the Dicampa? He was *my* friend, too," returned Gomez. "But he joined forces with the conqueror—and was shot for his treachery."

"Oh!"

"Juan Dicampa ended as so many deliverers end—as an apostle of 'the loaves and fishes.' Ha!" ejaculated Dario Gomez. "I and my followers, we are as yet poor enough to be honest. God keep us so!"

"But my father has surely done nobody harm," cried Janice. "I am sure his name must be known for justice and kindness in the Companos District."

"It is true, *mi general,*" said one of Gomez's men softly. "I am acquaint' weeth the Señor B-Day. He is a *gran hombre.*"

Dario Gomez pushed back his sombrero and ran a hand through his thick, graying hair, laughing with twinkling eyes and uplifted mustache into Janice's face.

"Shall we, then, play modern Robin Hoods to this so-beautiful señorita in distress?" he demanded.

"Who ees thees Rob'n 'Ood, *mi general?*" asked another of his followers. "A brave *compadre?*"

"You've said it," ejaculated Gomez, in good American slang. "Very famous."

"What more than we can *he* do?" asked the lesser bandit.

"True. Your wisdom is of the ancients, Pietro. What say, *hombrecitos?* shall we lend assistance to the so-beautiful señorita—the daughter of Señor B-Day?"

There seemed to be a growl of approval. "To San Cristoval, *mi general,*" said one. "There may yet be pickings."

The leader turned immediately and with business-like directness to Carlitos. "What has happened to the automobile?" he asked.

"Oh, Señor Gomez!" stuttered the driver. "She done bust."

"And you can't make on with her?"

"No, señor."

"She's more than cast a shoe, then?" laughed Dario Gomez. "So we must tackle horses to her, eh? 'Get a horse!' Horse power is surer than gasoline I have always believed."

"By goodness, yes!" groaned Carlitos Ortez.

Janice hastily climbed back beside the astounded Marty. He stared at her.

"Cricky!" he whispered. "Aren't you just the greatest girl that ever was, Janice? Wait till I tell the folks at home about this!"

Carlitos had a rope. He passed it around the entire body of the car, and straps and singletrees appeared for three horses. Evidently some of the bandits' mounts had been seized while at work.

Just as the three excited horses, their riders plying the quirt, sprang forward to drag the stalled car, Carlitos uttered a startling yell.

"There is a third, *mi general!*" he shouted to Gomez. "The thief and a son-of-a-thief! he haf not paid me *mi dinero!*"

"What's that?" demanded Dario Gomez.

"Anothair passenger—by goodness, yes! He have escaped!" and he pointed to the chaparral.

"What's this?"

"I forget heem till this moment," stammered Carlitos. "He is likewise of *los Americanos;* but he is not a friend to these two," and he gestured to Janice and Marty. "He afraid when you appear, *mi general.* He run."

"Ha!" ejaculated Gomez. "Perhaps he has cause for fear. We will find him."

He gave an order and ten of his men separated from the rest and began to encircle the patch of chaparral. The car was started again and, being but a light load for three horses, they went forward along the road at a gallop.

The bumping and jouncing Janice and Marty endured now was much worse than that which had gone before. The car under its own power was bad enough; but with the half-wild horses dragging it, the occupants of the tonneau thought surely it would be shaken to pieces.

Carlitos clung to the steering wheel, yelling instructions that were not heeded. These reckless *vaqueros* of the *pampas* (they were not Chihuahua men; they did not pronounce the *s,* and were therefore from the south) thought it rather good fun. But the rattle and banging of the automobile, like nothing so much as a tin-shop with a full crew working at high speed, urged the horses on and on.

"Believe me!" Marty managed to shout into his cousin's ear, "if I ever get out of this alive I never want even to *see* an automobile again. I'm glad you sold yours, Janice."

They struck into a better and smoother road after a while, and the journey was not so difficult. Janice wondered what had become of Tom Hotchkiss, and spoke of him to Marty.

"I hope they catch him and make him work for them. They tell me that these people have slaves down here just as though Abraham Lincoln had never lived," Marty declared. "You heard what Carlitos said about his grandfather.

"As long as we can't turn the fat chump over to the proper police, I hope he just gets his!" added the

boy, with venom in his tone of voice. "I hope the money he stole will never do him any good. But, poor dad! he's comin' out of the little end of the horn, I'm afraid."

Janice, too, was troubled about Uncle Jason's affairs. They had seemed on the point of helping him by Hotchkiss' capture—and then had missed it.

However, hope was growing momentarily in the girl's heart that she was going to reach and rescue her own father. She had won over these wild men so easily to help her that it seemed there could really be nothing now to obstruct the way to the Alderdice Mine. They were already in the Companos District, they told her.

Dario Gomez sometimes rode beside the car and shouted bits of information to them. It was apparent that the chief was well versed in English—had probably lived and been educated in the United States. He was, after all, an anomaly in the company he was with. Janice wondered in what spirit he had become chief with such wild companions for his followers.

The haze-capped mountains seemed much nearer now and the road was almost continually on a grade —either ascending or descending. At dusk they came in sight of several groups of houses.

"San Cristoval," announced Dario Gomez. "Until we learn how matters stand, yonder we may

not drag your tin Leezie," and he laughed. "You have had a ride, eh?"

"I never want another like it," growled Marty.

"But if I do not take them into the town, I get no pay," wailed Carlitos, suddenly realizing his situation. "That fat *hombre*—he escape. And these must ride into San Cristoval in the *tin Lizzie* or I get no *dinero*. Don Abreguardo say it."

"Ha! Don Abreguardo is a shrewd *hombre*," said Gomez.

"Don't worry!" Marty exclaimed. "We'll pay you, and we'll walk the rest of the way. Won't we, Janice?"

"Of course," she agreed. "I—I shall be glad to walk—if I can," and she got stiffly out of the car.

"*Bueno!* Now we depart," said Gomez, laughing. "We go seek my *compadres* and the fat *hombre* Carlitos tell me about. *Adios!*"

He wheeled his horse, waved his hand, and, with his troop clattering at his heels, rode swiftly away.

CHAPTER XXV

AN AMAZING MEETING

"WELL," Marty observed, just as though he were awakening from a dream—and an unbelievable one at that—"I s'pose we might's well toddle along into town. You're a wonder, Janice. You certainly pulled us out of one big mess—didn't she, Carlitos?"

The Mexican grinned, pocketing the money and the paper they had signed. "The señorita a fine la-dee, eh?" he said. "She make even the Señor Gomez dance when she whistle—by goodness, yes!"

Janice could not call up much of a smile. She was anxious to get into San Cristoval, and she was so wearied by the long ride in the automobile that she could scarcely hobble along, clinging to Marty's arm.

"Where shall we look for lodgings in the town, Carlitos?" she asked. "You must know some hotel."

"The Golden Fan," the man said promptly. "It is as good as any. I leev you here to find horse. *Adios,* señorita; *adios,* señor."

The cousins went on wearily together. Even the

volatile Marty seemed lost in thought. Finally he said:

"Well! if they catch him——"

"Who?" Janice demanded.

"Tom Hotchkiss. If the outlaws catch him I hope they'll put him somewhere where he'll get nothing to eat but beans. Cricky, Janice! ain't I hungry for *real* grub!"

"I want to rest—just rest," moaned the girl.

They reached the town after a while. It was then fully dark, but they easily found The Golden Fan. There was a flaring gasoline lamp before the door, over which was painted a huge yellow fan.

A man in sombrero and high boots with spurs lounged in the doorway. He first spoke to them in the vernacular; then:

"*Madre di Dios!* What do you here? *Los Americanos*—eh, yes?"

"We're not *lost* Americans," replied Marty, misunderstanding. "Just travelers."

"*Sí*, señor. Come to what you call 'see the sights,' yes?" and the man's grin was like that of a cat. He had yellow eyes, too, and a stiff, sparse mustache like a cat's.

"We want a place to sleep and, first of all, some supper," Marty said. "Do you run this hotel?"

The man turned his head and shouted over his shoulder:

"Maria!"

He added something in Spanish that the Americans did not catch, although they were now learning a bit of the vernacular. Almost immediately a wretched-looking half-breed woman, very dirty and unintelligent of feature, shuffled into view.

"*She* the keeper of this hotel," said the yellow-eyed man, grinning again at Janice and Marty.

The girl held back. These people were not like the Mexicans they had before met. She was intuitively afraid of them.

"You want bed? You want eat?" demanded the woman gruffly.

"Yes," said Marty.

"You got money?"

"Of course," the boy said loftily.

But Janice was tugging at his sleeve, whispering:

"Perhaps we can go somewhere else. Some better place."

The man seemed to have preternaturally sharp ears. "The Golden Fan ver' good hotel, señorita," he said. "Maria, she do for you."

"Ugh! she looks it," muttered Marty. "But I guess we'd better risk it, Janice."

"Be careful," breathed the girl when they were inside. "Don't show much money, dear."

"I'm on!" whispered the boy in reply. He had some silver and produced an American dollar. "You see we have money," he said aloud.

The woman led them into a poorly lighted, almost

empty room. There was a table and some chairs but not much other furniture and no ornaments save an old-fashioned wax flower piece under a glass shell on a shelf. Where that, once a cherished parlor ornament of the mid-Victorian era, could have come from down here in Mexico was a mystery.

"Not enough," said the half-breed woman, referring to the dollar, her greedy eyes snapping.

"It's two dollars Mex," announced Marty with decision.

"'Nuff for supper. 'Nother dol' for bed," declared Maria.

Janice touched Marty's hand. "Do not argue," she whispered.

The man had followed them and lolled in the doorway of the room, listening and watching. It was not until then that Janice saw he wore boldly a pistol in a holster dangling from his belt.

"All right," Marty was saying rather ungraciously. "We'll give you two dollars, American, for supper and a night's lodging. Two rooms, mind. If you ask more we'll go out and hunt up some other place to stop."

"There ees no othair hotel but Maria's, young señor," said the man in the doorway, laughing.

"We'll go to see the mayor, then," said Janice hastily. "Don Abreguardo, of La Guarda, is our friend."

"Huh?" grunted the woman, looking at the man

questioningly. He still laughed. "The mayor of La Guarda is not known here, señorita; and San Cristoval have no *cacique*."

"What's that?" demanded Marty suspiciously.

"He iss shot in the battle—*sí, sí!* San Cristoval iss of late a battlefield."

"Oh!" Janice murmured and sat down. Not alone was she very weary, but all strength seemed suddenly to leave her limbs.

"Been having hot times here, have you?" asked Marty briskly. "Who's ahead?"

"Oh, Marty!" gasped his cousin.

"Who has won, señor?" said the catlike man.

"Yes."

"Eet ees hard to say. First one then the other army enter San Cristoval. It iss said the Army of Deliverance is being driven back now into the hills. The government troops are between us and the mountains. But eet ees well to cry *Viva Méjico* to whomever the señor meets."

"Huh!" said Marty. "I've heard that ever since we crossed the Rio Grande."

This was an entirely different hostelry from any they had entered since arriving at the Border. Indeed, Janice was very doubtful of their safety. The woman was greedy and ugly; the man seemed ripe for almost any crime.

The latter's presence in the doorway did not disturb Marty much; but when the woman brought the

tortillas and *frijoles* and some kind of fish stewed in oil with the hottest of hot peppers, Janice merely played with the food. Because of the baleful glance of the man's yellow eyes her appetite was gone. Maria too watched the guests in a silence that seemed to bode evil.

This town of San Cristoval, although much larger than La Guarda or La Gloria, was very different from either, it seemed. Not a sound came from the street. There was no music or dancing or the chattering of voices outside. It was as though San Cristoval had been smitten with a plague.

"Cricky! I bet these beans have got on your nerves, too, Janice," said Marty, seeing her fork idle.

She giggled faintly at that. "I never heard that beans troubled one's nerves," she said. "It's these people—staring at us so!"

"Yep. Eat-'em-up-Jack there in the doorway *would* almost turn your stomach," agreed Marty cheerfully. "And a bath would sure kill Maria."

The boy was good-naturedly oblivious of the sinister manner of the two Mexicans—or appeared to be; but Janice grew more and more troubled as time passed, and started at every movement Maria or the man made.

"Say, you," Marty asked while he was still eating, addressing the man, "is the railroad running to the mines yet?"

"Which mine, señor?" returned the yellow-eyed man.

"A mine called the Alderdice is the one we want to go to."

Maria uttered a shrill exclamation and the man dropped his cigarette and put his foot upon it involuntarily.

"What ees thees about the Alderdice Mine?" he said softly. "Why do you weesh to go there?"

"Just for instance," returned Marty coolly. "You are not answering my question—and I asked first."

"No. The rails are torn up just outside the city," said the man with insistence. "Now answer *me,* young señor."

"That's what we've come down here into Mexico for," Marty told him calmly. "To visit the Alderdice Mine. Do you know the man who runs it?"

"Señor B-Day!" gasped Maria, who seemed to be much moved. She had come closer to the table and was staring at Janice earnestly. The girl shrank from her, but Marty was still looking at the man lounging in the doorway.

"Yes. Broxton Day. He's the man," the boy said with admirable carelessness of manner. "Is he all right?"

"Who *are* you, señor?" asked the man abruptly.

"I'm a feller that wants to see this Mr. Day," said Marty, grinning.

"And the señorita! the señorita!" shrilled Maria. "I tell you, Juan, thees ees a strange t'ing!" She went on in Spanish speaking eagerly to the man.

"Do you not know Señor B-Day was shot?" demanded the man, Juan, still addressing Marty.

"Yes! Yes!" cried Janice, clasping and unclasping her hands. "Is he seriously hurt? Oh! tell me."

Maria came closer to her. After all the ragged creature had not such a sinister face. It was her Yaqui blood that made her look so forbidding.

"Señorita! señorita!" she murmured, "you *lofe* that Señor B-Day, do you not?"

"He is my father!" burst out Janice desperately. "Tell me about him. Is he badly hurt? How can we get to him? Oh! I wish we might go to-night!"

"*Madre di Dios!*" ejaculated the woman, looking at the man again. "I knew eet, Juan."

"Well! tell it to *us*," growled Marty.

"She say you look like Señor B-Day," said the man, grinning. "We know heem alla right. I work' for him and so did Maria. He good-a man. One *gran hombre—sí, sí!*"

"But how badly is he hurt?" cried the girl. "Tell me."

"He been shot in the shoulder and in the right arm," said Juan, pointing. "He alla right—come through safe—sure!"

"But we have not heard a word from him——"

"He no can write. And at first, and alla time now, the bandits keep him shut up there at the mine. It ees so. Now the Señor General De Soto Palo come. He attack the bandits. They soon be driven into the mountains away from the mines and we—we go back to work again for Señor B-Day. Sure."

The relief Janice felt was all but overpowering. She could not speak again for a minute; but Marty demanded:

"Do you mean to say we can go up there to the Alderdice Mine to-morrow morning?"

"If Señor General De Soto Palo permits—*sí, sí!*" said Juan, grinning again. "But no ride on railroad I tell you, señor."

"Will you go with us?" the boy asked.

"As far as may be," said the man with a shrug of his shoulders.

"For how much?" demanded Marty bluntly.

"For notting," declared Juan. "Your bed notting. Your food notting. Friends of the good Señor B-Day shall be treat' as friends by us—yes, huh?"

Maria was patting Janice's hand softly and she nodded acquiescence. Janice's eyes had overflowed. Marty choked up, and said gruffly:

"Hi tunket! don't that beat all? It pays to make people like you same as Uncle Brocky does. And *you* do it, too, Janice. Dad says: 'Soft words but-

ter no parsnips'; but I dunno. I have an idea it pays pretty good interest to make friends wherever and whenever you can."

Whatever might have been the natural character of Juan and Maria, their attitude towards the cousins changed magically. The half-breed woman could not do enough for the twain, and Juan of the yellow eyes became suddenly respectful if not subservient.

The fact remained that these Mexicans did not love *los Americanos,* but they distinguished friends.

The tavern was a poor place; but the best in it was at the disposal of Janice and Marty. And the girl, at least, went to bed with confidence in the future.

Her father might be detained—hived up as it were—at the mine; but he was not seriously hurt and she might reach him soon.

Juan was evidently the poorest of peons. All he could obtain in the morning was a burro for the girl to ride. He said Marty must walk the fourteen miles to the mine as he did.

"Don't worry about me. I'm glad to walk after riding two days in that tin Lizzie," declared the boy.

They set forth early. Only a few curious and silent people watched them go. The town seemed more than half deserted.

"Those men who did not join the rebels," ex-

plained Juan, "haf run from the troops of the Señor General De Soto Palo. Oh, yes! They will come back—and go to work again later."

They set forth along the branch railroad, on which the ore was brought down from the mines to the stamp mills. In the yards box cars and gondolas were overturned and half burned; rails were torn up; switch shanties demolished.

"We Mexicans," said Juan, grinning, "we do not lofe the railroad, no! Before the railroad come our country was happier. *Viva Méjico!*"

"Hi tunket!" muttered Marty. "That '*Viva Méjico!*' business covers a multitude of sins—like this here charity they tell about. If you sing out that battle cry down here you can do 'most anything you want—and get away with it!"

They went on slowly, for no amount of prodding would make the burro go faster than a funeral march. On all sides they saw marks of the fighting which had followed the occupation of San Cristoval by the government troops.

Juan explained that General Palo had waited for reinforcements at first; but finally a part of the rebel army come over to him and fought against their former friends under the standard of the government; so he was now pushing on steadily, driving the other rebels before him.

"Why did they come over to the government side if they believe in *la patria?*" asked Marty curiously.

"For twenty centavos a day more, señor," said Juan placidly.

"What's that?" ejaculated the boy. "D'you mean they got their wages raised?"

"Why, señor, a man must leev," declared Juan mildly. "We get from thirty to feefty cents a day working in the mines, on the roads, in the forest—oh, yes! Señor B-Day pay the highest wages of anybody—sure. But to fight—ah! that is different, eh? One general give us seventy-fi' cents a day—good! But another offer us one dollair—'Merican. By goodness, yes! We fight for heem. Any boy that beeg enough to carry gun, he can get twice as much for fighting as he can for othair work. *Sí, sí,* señor."

"Oh, cricky! *'Viva Méjico!'*" murmured Marty.

It was just then that they turned a curve in the right of way and beheld a train standing on the track. At least, there were a locomotive and two cars.

They had not seen a human being since leaving the outskirts of the town; but here were both men and horses.

The men were armed; some of them were gayly uniformed. A young fellow in tattered khaki spurred his mount immediately toward Janice Day and her companions.

"What want you here, *hombres?*" he demanded

in Spanish, staring at Janice. "This is the headquarters of General De Soto Palo."

Juan was dumb, and before Marty could speak Janice put the question:

"Is it possible for us to get through to the Alderdice Mine, señor?"

"Certainly not!" was the reply in good English. "Our troops have not driven out the dregs of the rebel army as yet."

"May we speak with the general?" the girl pursued faintly.

"Certainly not!" the fellow repeated. "He has no time to spend with vagabond *Americanos.*"

"She's Señor B-Day's daughter," broke in Marty, thinking the statement might do some good.

"Ha!" ejaculated the young officer much to their surprise. "She we have expected. Consider yourself under ar-r-rest. March on!"

He waved his hand grandly toward the nearest car. Already Janice had seen that it was a much battered Pullman coach. But now the officer's declaration left Janice unable to appreciate much else but the fact that she had been expected and was a prisoner of the government forces!

Juan, immobile of countenance, prodded on the burro. Marty, too, was speechless. They came near to the observation platform of the Pullman coach.

Suddenly the door opened and there stepped into

the sunshine the magnificent figure of a woman in Mexican dress—short skirt, low cut bodice, with a veil over her wonderfully dressed hair. She looked down upon the approaching cavalcade with parted lips.

"Madam!" ejaculated Janice Day, and then could say no more.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT LAST

MARTY DAY was quite as amazed as his cousin at this meeting, for he, too, recognized the handsome black-eyed woman on the observation platform of the Pullman coach. He found his tongue first.

"What do you know about that?" he murmured. "Just like a movie, ain't it? She is that woman you were traveling with, Janice—the one I thought tried to swipe your money. And maybe she *did* try to at that!"

"Hush!" begged his cousin.

"Eet ees the Señora General De Soto Palo," hissed Juan. "She a gre't la-dee—huh?"

For a full minute the black-eyed woman stared at Janice and the latter wondered if the Señora General Palo would admit their acquaintanceship. They had been so "goot friends" on the train; would the señora acknowledge it now?

"Ach!" exclaimed the woman, her rather stern countenance blossoming into a smile. "You are a wonderful girl, my dear—soh! You have made your way here—through this so-strange country and with all against you. Have you saved your money

from robbery, too?" and her black eyes began to twinkle.

"Oh, Madam!" murmured Janice.

"Our money's safe all right all right," put in Marty.

Madam ignored him. "Come up here, my dear," she commanded in her full contralto voice, still smiling at the American girl.

Janice tumbled off the burro and hastily mounted the steps to the platform. The young officer who had led them here, and others of his ilk, stared from a distance and twirled their *mustachios*. Marty grinned at Juan.

"I guess we got a friend at court, eh, Juan?" he said in a whisper. "It takes our Janice to get us out of scrapes—believe me!"

"Of a verity, yes!" agreed Juan.

The black-eyed woman seized Janice Day in a warm embrace the moment the girl came near.

"Oh, Madam!" cried the latter. "I hope I did not offend you. You left so abruptly back there at Sweetwater——"

"Ach! it ees nothing," said the woman. "I was hurt—for the moment. You did not trust me."

"And you were continually warning me to trust nobody," interposed Janice, flushing.

"It is true!" cried the woman, patting her cheek. "I made you so fear for r-robbers that you fear poor *me,* eh? But that is past. I was sorry, later,

when I learn' just where my hoosban' is that I did not confide more in you and you in me, my dear."

"Oh! And you are really the wife of this general who commands here?" Janice exclaimed. "How wonderful!"

"Yes. General Palo has long been exile from his land. Soh! But now he is in favor with the government at Mexico City," explained Madam. "Yes! it was at his request I cut short my season in New York an' join him. He hope to be made governor of this deestrict when the campaign is over. He hope soon to settle all controversies and whip these rebel dogs back into the hills and keep them there."

"But, Madam, you are not Mexican!" cried Janice.

"Not by birth—no, my dear. Yet I am intensely patriotic for my hoosban's country—*Viva Méjico!*"

Janice sighed. She, like Marty, began to wonder at the universal cry for *la patria* from those of such conflicting opinions.

"No," said Madam. They were now sitting in a compartment of the Pullman that was evidently Madam's boudoir. "I am of blood Bohemian—with a strain of the greatest nation of all time," and she smiled.

"The Hebrew?"

"But yes. I have lived everywhere—on both continents," with a sweeping gesture. "Under my

own name—first made known to the world in Vienna—I sing. I am of the opera."

"Oh, Madam! I guessed *that,*" Janice declared with clasped hands.

"Yes? Well, it iss soh," said the lady sibilantly. "I hear in New York where I am singing at the Metropolitan that my hoosban' is advance. I pack and start for Mexico immediate. Contr-r-racts are nothing at such time, yes? I hasten across the continent to greet and applaud him. After I join him at San Cristoval I hear of things, and remember things that you say, my dear, that make me to understand you must be bound for this same place, too. It is sad you should not have come wit' me."

"My father!" gasped Janice. "Do you know if he is better?"

"I know that he is as yet holding out against the rebels," Madam said. "He, with a few desperate *compadres,* are guarding his mine buildings, yes-s!"

"Then he is not seriously wounded?" cried the girl gladly.

"I believe not. We get some information to and from the mine. Señor General De Soto Palo declare he will shell the rebels into the hills to-day, my dear. You have come in season."

Marty, meanwhile, sat comfortably on the car steps in the shade and said to Juan:

"I guess you can beat it back to town, old man,

if you want to. I have a hunch that, in spite of that gun you swing, and your look like a picture of a Spanish pirate I saw once, you ain't no fighting man; are you?"

"As the señor says," admitted Juan with a toothful grin and his yellow eyes squinting, "I am a man of peace—by goodness, yes!"

"All right. Here's a dollar—you're welcome to it. You're the only Mexican I've seen that didn't claim to be a fire-eater," and Marty chuckled. "You see, Janice knows the commander's lady and I fancy it's a cinch for us to reach Uncle Brocky now. Da, da, Juan."

"*Adios,* señor," responded the man and kicked the burro to start that peacefully grazing animal back along the railroad bed.

Suddenly the distant sound of firing disturbed the placidity of the scene about the "headquarters." The little group of officers began to show excitement.

"Sounds like a lot o' ginger-beer corks popping," thought Marty. "Must be something doing." He immediately grew eager himself.

When a little pudgy man in a red and green uniform, a plume in his hat, and yellow gauntlets, came from the forward car and mounted a horse held for him obsequiously, the boy knew he was viewing General De Soto Palo in all his dignity and glory. Truly it *was the* magnificent Madam's fate to be

admired by the "so-leetle" men—her husband not excepted.

"Hi tunket! I'd like to go with 'em," muttered Marty, as the cavalcade of officers rode swiftly away. "But I s'pose I got to stay on the job and guard Janice. Sometimes girls are certainly a nuisance."

There was a jar throughout the short train. The couplings tightened. With a squeal of escaping steam the locomotive forged ahead, dragging the general's headquarters car and Madam's living car with it.

Janice ran to the door. "Oh, Marty!" she cried. "Are you all right?"

"Right as rain," he assured her.

"We are going up nearer the battle-line. Oh, Marty! think of it! I may see daddy to-day!"

"Great!" he responded. "I hope the fight ain't all over when we get there."

They were yet ten miles from the Alderdice Mine and the train was more than an hour pulling that distance. They stopped often; and when the train did move it was at a snail's pace.

All the time the machine guns rattled like shaking pebbles in a cannister, the rifles popped and the shells exploded resonantly. Now and then they descried smoke above the tree tops. Occasionally they passed burning buildings.

And then appeared—more hateful sight than all

else—the dead body of a man lying beside the railroad track, face down, the back of his head all gory.

He was a little man. His hand still grasped a brown rifle almost as tall as himself.

The laboring train halted directly beside the dead man. Marty dropped down from the rear step and went to the corpse. He turned it over with curiosity.

And then suddenly there shot through the boy from the North a feeling of such nausea and horror that he was destined ever to remember it.

This was not a man that lay here. It was a boy—a little, yellow-faced, barefooted fellow not as old as Marty himself, with staring eyes which already the ants had found—and a queer, twisted little smile upon the lips behind which the white teeth gleamed.

Marty stumbled blindly back to the car, sobbing. "He's—he's laughing," he stammered to Janice. "I—I wonder if that's 'cause he's found out *now* how foolish it all is?"

They saw the end of the battle; by then it was mid-afternoon. A stream of wounded had been carried past the train on stretchers—back to a little temporary hospital somewhere in the woods out of sight of the belligerents. For the half-wild Indians from the hills respect no Red Cross.

They saw the last scattering, ragged horde limp away from the mesa on which were the buildings of

the Alderdice Mining Company, driven to cover by the cheering troops of Señor General De Soto Palo.

Here for some time the rebels had besieged the corrugated iron huts of the mining company, in which a handful of men held out tenaciously.

The lack of machine guns on the part of the Mexican rebels had made this defense of the mining property possible. The bursting shells from the heavier guns of the government forces had quite thrown them into panic.

The men guarding the mining property had finally retreated into a cellar under one of the store-sheds. The ore-raising machinery had been dismantled and hidden in the mine, and little of real value belonging to the mining company had been destroyed.

Now these guards appeared—not more than two dozen of them; powder-stained and unwashed, but a grim group prepared to keep up the fight if necessary.

The same young aide-de-camp who had "captured" Janice and Marty when they approached the headquarters of the general in command, now came to the Madam and her guests.

"If the señor and señorita wish to go forward, all is now quiet," he announced, bowing low before Janice and the Madam. "I will do myself the honor to conduct them to Señor B-Day. He is in the cellar."

"The cellar!" gasped the girl.

"With other wounded. Quite safe, I assure the señorita," added the aide-de-camp hastily.

"Oh! let us hurry!" cried the eager girl.

Her hasty feet took her in advance of the others. She reached the group of shacks where the window-lights were blown out and much wreckage strewed the ground. Before an open cellarway stood a ragged and barefooted soldier. He presented arms most grotesquely as the party came near.

"My father—Señor B-Day?" Janice asked.

At the sound of her voice a cry answered from within and a gaunt figure staggered up the stone steps into the sunlight.

"Janice! My Janice! Can it be possible?" cried the man, gazing in wonder at the girl. "Janice!"

"Daddy! Oh, Daddy!" she screamed, and ran toward him, her arms outstretched, her face all aglow.

"Hey, Janice!" called Marty right behind her. "Don't forget his arm's in a sling."

CHAPTER XXVII

MUCH TO TALK ABOUT

More than three years and a half! Can you imagine what such separation means to two people who love each other?

We read much, and hear much, about the strength of "mother-love." It is the most holy expression of the Creative Instinct—none doubt it.

Yet there is an emotion even deeper and wider than the affection of the mother for the child she has borne. Because through all these eras of advancing civilization man, the father, has shouldered the responsibility of caring for and protecting both the mother and the child.

Not enough thought is given to this. Father-love is often greater, more self-sacrificing, more noble than that given the offspring by the maternal parent. In this the mother follows instinct; she shares it with the female of all species.

When the child must depend upon the father for all—deprived of maternal parentage as was this girl, Janice Day—there is a bond between father and child that no other mortal tie can equal.

Never had this man gone to his couch at night

without a thought of the daughter he had left in the North—growing from a child to womanhood out of his sight. Nor had Janice Day with all her manifold interests forgotten for one single day her father and his lonely existence in Mexico.

Janice went into her father's arms and clung to him without speech—not intelligible speech at least. Yet there were words wrenched from both of them —little intimate words of passionate endearment like nothing Marty Day had ever heard before. Marty, steeled by the New England belief that the giving away to emotion, especially that of affection, was almost indecent, actually blushed for his relatives. Finally he drawled:

"Hi tunket! Give a feller a chance, will you, Janice? What d'you think, that I came clear down into Mexico here to play a dummy hand?"

"You're Marty!" cried Mr. Day, putting out his hand to his nephew.

"Surest thing you know," agreed Marty. "Dad and ma send their best regards."

At that Janice went off into a gale of laughter that was almost hysterical. Her cousin gazed upon her in mild surprise.

"Why, Janice!" he said. "You know they are always hounding me about my manners. What's wrong with *that?*"

Both father and daughter laughed at this and Marty grinned slowly. Anyway, matters had got

altogether too serious for the boy and he wanted somebody to laugh so that he could successfully gulp down his own deeper emotion.

The Madam came forward. She had to be introduced, and the tall, haggard man with his arm in a sling and his shoulder swathed in bandages very plainly impressed favorably the wife of Señor General De Soto Palo.

"Ach, my dear!" she confided to Janice later, "he is such a romantic-looking man! Now, to tell you the truth, as much as I adore the general, me, I could wish him the more distingué looking—ees eet not?"

Of course daddy was a splendid-looking man! Thin and haggard as he was, Janice thought nobody as interesting in appearance as daddy—not even Nelson!

She left it to Marty to relate in particular what had happened to them since they had left Polktown. And it lost nothing in the telling—trust Marty!

"It looks to me as though you two have had quite an adventurous career," Mr. Broxton Day said with twinkling eyes.

He had sat down in the sun, for he was still very weak. His own brief tale, Marty thought, savored of "the real thing."

Mr. Day had been treacherously attacked and shot, and had lain unattended for twenty-four hours at the mouth of the main shaft of the mine. He had

lost much blood at this time and was now scarcely able to travel. Yet during all the time the rebels had hemmed them in he had planned the defense of the mine buildings and held his handful of guards to their task.

"I can't put you up decently, Janice," he said. "You see, they've wrecked my quarters," and he gestured toward the building that had served him as office and living rooms before the battle.

"Oh, but, Daddy, we're not going to stay!" she cried. "I want to take you away from here just as soon as you can go. Do you suppose you could travel in Madam's car?"

Her father looked ruefully about at the havoc wrought by the enemy.

"Well," he sighed. "It will take months, I suppose, to put things to rights again. And this will be the third time we have had to do it. I suppose my head foreman could do most of it alone——"

"Why!" cried Janice, "he'll just have to! Daddy, you're going home with me to Polktown to stay till you are well and strong again. I wish we could start now."

Had Mr. Day suspected what the next few hours would bring forth they would have started immediately for San Cristoval—even had they walked. General Palo's victory, however, seemed so complete that the Americans did not suspect any menace of peril from a new quarter.

They took dinner with the general and "Madam," as Janice continued to call the woman, in the Pullman car that had been made over into a more or less luxurious "home" for the commander and his wife. There was a kitchen and a cook in it; and to Marty's unfeigned delight there were no beans on the bill-of-fare.

"Hi tunket!" he exploded when they came away from the Pullman coach to take possession of one of the sheds that Mr. Day's men had made habitable for the time being. "I don't know but these greasers would be more'n half human if they'd live on something besides *frijoles*. That little general is a nice little feller."

"Easy, nephew," advised his uncle, much amused after all by the boy's nonchalance and assumption of maturity. "Say nothing or do nothing to belittle a Mexican's dignity. They have a saying in their own tongue that means, 'If thou lose thy dignity thou hast lost that which thou wilt never find again.'

"The secret of half the trouble we Americans have in Mexico is in our failure to acknowledge this national trait. The poorest and most miserable peon often has in his heart a pride equal to that of a newly-made millionaire," and Mr. Broxton Day laughed.

"If you treat them cavalierly and as though they were beneath you, they may laugh. They are humble enough to their masters; ages of oppression have taught them sycophancy. But in their hearts is

bitter hate—and it flames out in these uprisings. *Then* they revenge themselves and, being profoundly ignorant, they seek that revenge from innocent and guilty alike."

This could not be said to interest Marty greatly. As soon as they were in the house he sought the couch prepared for him. But Janice and her father sat talking for half the night.

There was much for them to talk about. Until recently, of course, their letters to each other had fully and freely related personal happenings; but there were many intimate affairs to be discussed by Broxton Day and his grown-up daughter. For so she seemed to him. His little Janice had blossomed into womanhood. Yet she had not grown away from him; she was nearer and dearer.

"You can understand things now that you might not have appreciated three years or so ago," said her father. "Oh! I admit it was somewhat of a shock to me when I first saw you to-day—you are so tall and so much the woman, my dear. Your photographs haven't done you justice. I see you are quite the grown woman. Yet you had to run away to escape Jason's opposition to your plans? Good soul!" and he chuckled.

She laughed, then sighed. "Yes. I could not bear actually to defy him."

"Ah! And this young man you've told me so much about in your letters? What about Nelson?"

her father asked, scrutinizing her countenance keenly.

Janice could not altogether hide her feeling that, somehow, Nelson had failed her. The loyal girl found herself in the position of an apologist. She could not really explain why he had not come with her to Mexico.

"He—he did not believe I meant to come," she confessed.

"You told him?" asked her father.

"Yes. I told him I should."

"My dear," said Mr. Day thoughtfully, "the young man cannot know you very well, after all."

Janice sighed. "I *thought* he did," she observed. "I've been so busy—so anxious—about you and all, Daddy—that I have not thought much about Nelson until now. I realize it would have been very difficult—indeed impossible—for him to have left his school in the middle of the term to come with me. But he did not believe I meant what I said. That—that is where it hurts, Daddy."

"Well! well!" murmured Broxton Day. "You're not like other girls, Janice. I can see that. And I imagine, for that very reason, you have picked out a young man for yourself that is quite your opposite. I have an idea Nelson Haley is a very common type of youth," and his eyes twinkled.

"Oh, but he isn't, Daddy! Not at all!" she

cried, quick to defend. "He is quite remarkable. Why—listen——"

And then there poured out of the girl's heart all the story of her acquaintanceship with Nelson from the first time she had met him with his motorcycle on the old lower Middletown road.

Did Mr. Broxton Day listen patiently? Imagine it! He was hearing from the lips of this lovely girl-woman, whom he had seen last as a child, all the tale of her romance; the sweetest, most endearing tale a daughter can possibly narrate to a sympathetic and understanding father. He saw, too, with her eyes those better qualities of the young schoolmaster that did not, perhaps, appear on the surface—the deeper moods and passions of his being that responded to the spur of the girl's own character. Broxton Day realized that Janice's influence must mean much to Nelson Haley; yet that the young man had in him that which made it quite worth while for Janice to hold him in the strong regard she did.

They talked of other matters that night, too—these two long separated comrades. Uncle Jason's difficulties came in for their share of attention. Mr. Day now for the first time learned of Jason Day's trouble, for Janice's letter telling about it had failed to reach the Alderdice Mine.

In his present crippled state Broxton Day was quite willing to go back to Polktown with his daugh-

ter for the winter. And for his brother's sake he would have gone in any case.

During his working of the mine since coming to Mexico, Broxton Day had accumulated considerable money which he had immediately re-invested in securities in the North.

"No more carrying of all the eggs in one basket, my dear," he said to Janice. "I have enough elsewhere to help Jase out. So don't worry about *that* any more."

They might have talked all night; only Janice knew her father, in his present weakened state, should have rest. She insisted that he roll up in his blanket, as Marty had done hours before. When his regular breathing assured her Mr. Day was asleep, the girl stole to his side and tucked the blanket about his shoulders with maternal care.

"Dear Daddy!" she whispered, stooping to press her soft lips to his wind-beaten cheek.

As she did so a sound outside startled her. Then came a cry and several rifle shots, followed by the clatter of arms and the quick, staccato orders of the officers calling the men to "fall in."

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOM HOTCHKISS REAPPEARS

JANICE went quickly to the door, opened it, and stepped out. Already the night was old. The footsteps of Dawn were on the eastern hills. On the mesa, however, the encroaching forest made the shadows black. She could barely see the "headquarters" train of General Palo.

A man stumbled by and Janice caught at his arm. It was one of her father's men who had remained to guard the mine.

"What is it? What has happened?" she asked, without betraying all the fear she felt.

She knew that more than half of the government troops had followed the retreating rebels into the hills and had not returned to the military base. The present confusion of the soldiers that remained portended something desperate she knew.

"A night attack?" she asked.

"It may be, señorita," whispered the man. "A person has just been brought in—captured by our pickets."

"Oh!"

"An *Americano,* señorita. He say Dario Gomez,

that bandit unhung, señorita, is about to attack. He has gathered a gre't force and will attack General De Soto Palo. *Sí! sí!*"

"Dario Gomez?" repeated Janice. "Why, I—— Who is this American who has been captured?"

"A deserter. A prisoner. I know not. *Quién sabe?*"

"But what does he look like?" insisted Janice.

"Oh, señorita! He is a fat man and wears a red vest across his stomach—so," and the man gestured.

"Tom Hotchkiss!" murmured Janice.

"I come back to warn Señor B-Day if there be need," promised the guard and was gone.

Janice heard a horse charging past her from the direction of the general's car. In the dim light she thought she recognized the young aide-de-camp who had been so much in evidence the day before. He rode off into the north, away from the mine, and Janice believed he had gone to recall that part of the government troops now absent.

Did General Palo consider the promised attack of the banditti serious? When Janice had been in Dario Gomez's company he had had but forty followers!

She re-entered the shed and closed the door. Her father and Marty were sleeping quietly. Should she arouse them?

The girl was already becoming used to war's

alarms. She determined to watch alone. By no possibility could she have closed her eyes now in slumber.

While her father and Marty slept peacefully, Janice Day sat by a dim and rather smoky lantern and watched. Confused sounds of marching and countermarching soldiery reached her ears; but from a distance.

Suddenly the uproar increased—then more rifle shots in the distance. Her father roused up, half asleep yet.

"What's that?" he demanded.

A sharp rap came upon the door. Janice arose hastily.

"Lie down, father," she said reassuringly. "I will go."

"The Señor General De Soto Palo order you all to the train. We make stand there, señorita," said the man who had knocked. "The bandits are at hand."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Day again, wide awake.

Marty rolled off his couch and appeared in the light of the smoky lantern, the snub-nosed revolver in his hand. "Hey! I'm in this!" he croaked, but half awake. "What's doing?"

Swiftly Janice told them what little she had learned while she crammed things into her bag. The man at the door urged haste.

"That Gomez—he is near," sputtered the messenger.

"Why, we know that feller," Marty drawled. "I don't think he'd do anything to us, would he, Janice?"

"Never trust appearances with these Mexican banditti," said Mr. Day gravely. "I've shared the contents of his tobacco pouch with one and then had him try to cut my throat the next day. They are light-hearted, light-fingered and—lightest of all in their morals. I wonder that you two got away from Gomez as you did."

"And Tom Hotchkiss got away from him, too, did he?" growled Marty. "Well, that's too bad."

"Come, señor!" urged the messenger in the doorway.

They hurried to the headquarters car. It was growing lighter in the east. The rifle fire on the southern edge of the mesa was becoming sharper. General De Soto Palo had not led his troops in person against the attack of the banditti. Indeed, it was evident that he had been aroused from his peaceful slumbers at the beginning of the excitement; even now he had not removed his nightcap. He was not half so fierce-appearing in this headgear as he had been in his plumed hat.

But Tom Hotchkiss, cowering in a corner, seemed to think that the general was quite fierce enough.

"You want to remember I'm an American," he

was saying whiningly. "Something's got to be done for me. I can't be treated this way, you know."

"Señor B-Day!" exploded the little general. "Do you know this man?"

"Day!"

Tom Hotchkiss almost shrieked it and would have sprung forward to peer into Mr. Broxton Day's face had not two of the barefooted soldiers held him back by the ungentle means of their bayonets.

"Yes. It is Thomas Hotchkiss," Mr. Day said, eyeing the fat man without favor.

"You're Brocky Day!" exclaimed the prisoner with sudden relief. "Well, you tell these fellers——"

The general raised his hand for silence. The soldiers suddenly pinned Mr. Hotchkiss into his corner with points that evidently hurt.

"Ouch!"

"You know this man, Señor Day?"

"Yes, General."

"Is he to be trusted to speak the truth?"

"Never," said Mr. Day firmly, "unless the truth serves him better than lying."

"Ah!"

"I understand he claims to have escaped from Gomez?"

"*Sí*, señor."

"It may be so," said Mr. Day. "My daughter and nephew say they were in Gomez's power day

before yesterday and they have reason to believe that this Hotchkiss was captured by the bandit."

"And how strong was Gomez's party when the señorita saw eet?"

"Forty!"

"Ah! But this man say he have thousands of troops—that an attack in force is intended on the mesa."

"It sounds as though there was some fighting going on out there," admitted Mr. Day. "But it may just be my own troops wasting ammunition. They have plenty—and are like children."

Mr. Day gave Tom Hotchkiss a long and penetrating stare.

"I'm free to confess, *mi general*," he said finally, "I don't know whether to believe this fellow or not. He's a criminal, wanted by the American officers. That is sure. It has always been my opinion that if a man is crooked in one environment he is very apt to be so in another."

Before the doughty little commander could make reply the rattle of rifle shots increased. It grew nearer. Janice clung to her father's arm.

The door of the office-car was flung open and the Madam suddenly appeared. She wore a wonderfully figured satin boudoir gown and a cap to match; and she was plainly very much frightened.

"General! General!" she cried. "The cook has left! Is there really danger?"

General De Soto Palo muttered something in Spanish that was probably not polite. His wife saw and recognized Janice.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried. "We are the only two females here! Return with me. I see the general is disturbed. Come, my dear. We are such goot friends—yes?"

Before Janice could reply there sounded the sharp *plop* of a bullet and a hole appeared in the window-pane directly above the general's desk. The bits of shattered glass showered over the little man in the nightcap; but he did not move or show any alarm.

Tom Hotchkiss squealed and tried to lie down in his corner. The two barefoot soldiers prodded him to a standing posture again.

This had been a baggage car in its day, and the windows were few and high. The impact of other bullets in the wooden walls was plainly heard. The rifle fire was advancing and it was not all ammunition wasted by the government troops.

"My angel," said the general softly, "take the señorita into the other car. Lie down below the level of the window sills—both. That will be safer."

Madam seized Janice's hand and drew her out through the vestibule. Mr. Day made a motion to Marty.

"Just go along and see that nothing happens to them, my boy," he said.

The Pullman car was fitted with thin steel shut-

ters over the plate-glass windows and they had been closed the night before; but evidently General De Soto Palo did not altogether trust these shutters to keep out stray bullets.

The sharp ping of the lead as it sunk in the woodwork or the more resonant ring of those bullets glancing from the shutters became more and more frequent. The explosion of the guns sounded nearer. It was plain that the government troops were retreating from the southern edge of the mesa where the attack had opened. Dario Gomez and his followers seemed to be pressing on.

"Well, Marty, you wanted to see a battle," his cousin said to the boy. "Are you satisfied now?"

"Huh! I'm not seein' this one, am I?" he challenged. "Hi! what's that?" he added briskly.

The distant shriek of a steam whistle came faintly to her ears. Janice and the general's wife looked at each other. Marty drawled:

"Sounds like the old *Constance Colfax* comin' into the dock, don't it, Janice? But I reckon they don't have steamboats up in these hills, do they?"

CHAPTER XXIX

"JUDGE B-DAY"

THE long call of the whistle through the hills was smothered in another and nearer burst of firearms. The rattle of bullets against the half-armored side of the Pullman told their own story and told it unmistakably. The bandits were coming in force; the troops under General Palo's subordinates were not standing up to the enemy at all!

The three in the Pullman heard the doughty little general charging out of the other car to take personal leadership of the defending forces, and Janice believed her father, wounded though he was, had gone with him.

Marty had shot through the corridor of the car and the open compartments to the rear. There he clawed open the door and stepped out upon the observation platform.

Again he had heard that cheerful, raucous whistle.

"Hi tunket!" he said to Janice who followed. "If that don't sound like a steamboat——"

"Or a steam train?"

"But those rails were torn up outside San Cristoval."

"They could be spiked to the sleepers again," the girl said quickly.

"Cricky! who's coming. then?" the excited boy demanded. "Friends or foes?"

"Oh, dear me!" sighed Janice. "Everybody seems to be fighting everybody else down here. Suppose we are in the middle of a great battle, Marty Day?"

"Hi tunket! It'll be something to tell about when we get back to Polktown."

"*If* we get back," she shuddered.

"Shucks! of course we will. Though I'd like to stay here and get that mine to working again. I wonder if Uncle Brocky would let me?"

"Marty Day! You're the most awful-talking boy I ever heard. Oh!"

Another volley of rifle shots drowned her voice. They crouched together by the open door of the car and heard the bullets sing past.

"What shall we do if there are really more of the enemy coming?" murmured Janice, after the immediate shower of lead was over.

"Holler '*Viva Méjico!*' and let it go at that," grinned Marty. "That goes big with all of 'em."

It was no laughing matter nevertheless, and Marty did not feel half so cheerful as he appeared. But the boy felt it incumbent upon him to keep up the spirits of his cousin.

The sun was coming up, yet the shadows still lay

deep upon the mesa. Peering out of the doorway of the car Janice and Marty could see the shifting ranks of the government troops. They retired after each volley. How near, or how many the bandits numbered, the anxious spectators had no means of judging.

That most of the rifle balls went high was, however, a fact. They pattered on the sides of the cars, some of them above the windows; and there seemed to be few casualties.

"It gets *me!*" murmured Marty.

Then the whistle sounded again—unmistakably that of a locomotive. It was approaching steadily. There was a steep grade up the front of the mesa and they could distinguish the panting of the locomotive exhaust as it essayed this rise.

"It's coming!" Janice gasped.

Nobody seemed to notice the approach of the strange locomotive but themselves. The desultory firing about them went on. The officers commanding the government troops seemed to know but one order—that to "fire by platoons and fall back." It was true that the woods covered the position of the enemy and hid their number as well.

On this side of the plateau there was no place for the maneuvering of horses. The ground was too rough. But why the general did not sweep the wood with his machine guns, or shell it with his howitzers, seemed a mystery. It was not until after-

ward that the Americans learned there had been other treachery besides that of Tom Hotchkiss. Every big gun had been put out of commission before Dario Gomez's attack.

In the growing light there was now to be distinguished the flash of rifles at the edge of the wood. Word was passed that the bandits were about to charge.

At this flank of the line the officer in command thought more of his own safety and that of his men than aught else. At his order the troops suddenly shifted *to the other side of the car!*

"Hi tunket!" yelled Marty. "This is where we get off! Lie down, Janice, for we are going to be between two fires."

The sun's jolly red face appeared over the hills and suddenly revealed the battle picture clearly. The morning mists and rifle smoke were dissipated, and at almost the same moment the forefront of the whistling locomotive poked out of the forest. There were several slat cars attached to the great engine. Marty stood up again in the doorway of the Pullman and yelled. He saw that the cattle cars bristled with rifles and were gay with red and green uniforms.

"Oh! who are they?" cried Janice, directly behind her cousin.

"They're government troops, all right all right! Reinforcements for Miz' Madam, I declare. No

other soldiers in Mexico could afford real uniforms," Marty shouted.

They beheld the uniformed soldiery pile out of the cars and heard them cheer. One figure in civilian dress was running ahead and came to the observation platform of the Pullman first.

"*Viva Méjico!*" yelled Marty, glaring at this individual as though he saw an apparition.

"You young whipper-snapper!" exclaimed the apparition. "Where's Janice?"

"*Nelson!*"

"Oh, then," grumbled Marty, "*you* see the same thing I do, do you?"

Janice darted past her cousin and stretched her arms out to the schoolmaster. As he leaped up the steps to meet her the troops reinforcing General De Soto Palo began to deploy across the mesa and the firing of the bandits from the wood suddenly ceased.

"Do tell!" murmured Marty, staring at the schoolmaster and his cousin. "Gone to a clinch, have they? Huh! I guess it's time to go home."

It was some moments before Janice realized that her father was standing by, a smoking revolver in his left hand and a rather grim smile upon his lips.

"You might introduce me, my dear," he said mildly. "This, I presume, is Nelson?"

"Mr. Day!" cried the schoolmaster, who seemed much brisker and more assertive than had been his

wont at home, " I am delighted to see you looking so well. I feared——"

" Evidently," Mr. Day said dryly. " Was it *fear* that brought you down here into Mexico, Mr. Haley?"

" Yes, sir. Fear for Janice's safety," the young man replied with a direct look. " It was for her I came."

" Ah? Well, we'll talk of that later," Broxton Day returned.

There was no time then for further personalities. Madam appeared, still in *dishabille,* to meet the schoolmaster, and the general, too, strutted forward.

The bandits had made off; these reinforcements had been sent to obey his, General De Soto Palo's, orders; his campaign must now be successful against all the rebels in this part of Chihuahua. But he would beg his good friend, Señor B-Day, and the young Señor Haley, to add to their party in retreat to the Border the so-br-r-rave wife of his bosom, Señora Palo! There was, too, a certain locked chest——

It was decided before breakfast, the frightened cook having returned, that the Pullman car should be coupled to the second locomotive and be pulled back to San Cristoval. There it might be attached to some train going to El Paso, for the railroad was open again to the Border, the government troops patrolling all that part of Chihuahua.

It was at breakfast that Nelson related in sequence his own adventures, after hearing of all that had happened to Janice and Marty. And Nelson boldly held Janice's hand—under the table—neglecting to eat while he told his moving tale.

He had had no means of learning when and where Janice and Marty crossed the Rio Grande, if at all, until he reached El Paso. Then a long telegram reached him from Frank Bowman, repeating Marty's message sent to Jason Day from Fort Hancock, and including the information of the presence of Tom Hotchkiss at the Border.

At El Paso Nelson had learned the railroad was open once more and that a government force was assigned to join General Palo's division at the mines beyond San Cristoval. Therefore, believing to get to Mr. Broxton Day and rescue him from further peril was the more important, Nelson had postponed looking for Janice and Marty, but had used such influence as he could muster to obtain permission to join the reinforcements going up into the hills.

"I did not know where this dear girl was—in the body," said Nelson, with a proud look at Janice; "but I knew where her heart was. It would be with her father up here in the hills and I knew I could do nothing to win her gratitude more surely than by coming immediately to the Alderdice Mine."

"Nelson! how well you know me, after all!" Janice murmured.

There was much haste in getting ready for the departure. The general declared over and over again that the front was no place for his dear wife, after all. He had made a mistake in allowing her to come on from New York. It would be a long time yet before the district would be a settled place. But in time—— And there was the chest of valuable—er—papers, and the like!

"Most of them do it," Mr. Broxton Day said reflectively to his little party. "Just as soon as these 'liberators' acquire a little power they acquire treasure of a lasting quality. And this treasure they cache outside of Mexico. It is a sign of thrift; the laying up of something against the proverbial rainy day. And these rainy days in Mexico sometimes suggest the deluge."

There was another small matter that puzzled the general.

"He is *Americano,* señor," he said to Mr. Day. "He of the red vest. I know not for sure whether he was sent to rouse panic among my troops or no. He succeeded in doing so and Dario Gomez might have plundered the camp with his handful of men.

"If he were one of my own people I would have him shot without compunction. If you would decide, señor——"

"Let me talk to him, General," said Broxton Day quietly.

His talk with the man who had swindled his brother resulted in Tom Hotchkiss gladly joining the party bound for the Border. What they might do to him in the United States would be nothing so bad as an adobe wall and a file of riflemen!

"Now, Judge B-Day!" whispered Janice in her father's ear, "pass judgment likewise on another culprit."

"Who, Daughter?"

"What do you think of Nelson now that you have seen him and know what he has done?"

"My dear," said "Judge B-Day," smiling at her tenderly, "caution was never yet a fault to my mind—and Nelson possesses it. It may go well with your impulsiveness. After all, I think your Nelson is a good deal of a man."

This dialogue was between Janice and her father. Marty was still eyeing the cringing Tom Hotchkiss.

"The water's all squeezed out o' *that* sponge," sniffed Marty. "He'll never fill out that red vest of his again—not proper. And won't dad take on a new lease of life when he hears about it—hi tunket!"

CHAPTER XXX

AT HOME

THE rear room of Massey's drugstore, behind the prescription counter, was the usual meeting place of the Polktown schoolboard. There was, it is true, a well furnished board-room in the new school building; but habit was strong in the community and as long as the bespectacled druggist held a vote in school matters the important business of the board would be done here.

The day Nelson Haley had left them in the lurch and they had to scurry about to obtain the services of a substitute principal for the Polktown school, the board gathered after supper at Massey's in a very serious mood. There was considerable indignation expressed at the young schoolmaster's course. Even Mr. Middler looked gravely admonitory when he spoke of Nelson. Massey sputtered a good deal over it.

"That jest about fixes him with *me*," he said. "Leavin' us in a hole this way to go traipsin' off to the Mexican Border after that gal and Marty Day. He'd better hunt a new job when he comes back."

"Let us not be hasty," Mr. Middler said, but half agreeing.

It was Cross Moore who took up the matter from an entirely different point of view. He was usually a man of few words and he was not voluble now; but what he said drew the surprised and instant attention of everyone.

"Did it ever occur to you," he drawled, "that mebbe we owe Nelson Haley something?"

"Owe him? No, we don't," snapped Massey, the treasurer. "I gave him his check up to the fifteenth day of December only two days ago."

"Something money can't pay for," pursued the unruffled selectman. "You know, we were pretty hard on him all last summer. About them lost gold coins, I mean."

"Well! we gave him his job back, didn't we?" asked Crawford.

"True, true," the minister joined in.

"Well, what ye goin' to do about his runnin' off an' leavin us in this fix?" bristled Massey, glaring about at his fellow committeemen.

"I move you, Mr. Chairman," said Cross Moore quietly, "that we give Mr. Haley a vacation—with pay."

"Oh, by ginger!" gasped the excited druggist. "For how long, I sh'd admire to know?"

"Till he returns with Janice Day," said Cross Moore.

"I—I second the motion," stammered the minister.

And this decision—finally passed without a dissenting voice—made no more stir in the community than did several occurrences during the days that immediately followed.

Polktown was indeed stirred to its depths. Nelson's hasty departure to "bring back Janice and that Day boy," as it was said, was but one of these surprising happenings.

Something happened at Hopewell Drugg's that excited all the women in the neighborhood.

"Jefers-pelters!" was Walky Dexter's comment. "They run together like a flock o' hens when the rooster finds the wheat-stack. Sich a catouse ye never *did* hear! Ye'd think, ter listen to 'em, there'd never been a baby born in this town since Adam was a small child—er-haw! haw! haw! I dunno what they would ha' done, I'm sure, if it had been twins."

Uncle Jason came very near to being a deserted husband for a week. Aunt 'Mira seemed determined to live at Hopewell Drugg's. He finally plodded across town and entered the store on the side street with determination in his soul and fire in his eye. The store chanced to be empty, but from the rear room came the wailing notes of Hopewell's violin. Yet there was a sweetness to the tones of the instrument, too, even to Jason Day. Uncle Jason halted

and his weather-beaten face lost its hardness and the light of battle died out of his eyes.

"'Rock-a-bye, baby! on the tree-top,'"

wailed the old tune. Uncle Jason tiptoed to the doorway. Hopewell, with the instrument cuddled under his chin, was picking out the old song, but falteringly.

"And there's jest *glory* in his face," muttered Uncle Jason.

"Oh, Mr. Day!" exclaimed the storekeeper, awakening suddenly and laying down his violin with tenderness. "Did—did you want something?"

"Wal, I *was* bent on gittin' my wife. But I reckon I might's well lend her to ye a leetle longer, an' be neighborly. How's the boy?"

"They tell me, Mr. Day, that he's a wonderful child," Hopewell said seriously.

"I bet ye!" chuckled Uncle Jason. "They all be. Wal, as I can't have Almiry, ye might's well give me a loaf of bread. Gosh! boughten bread's dry stuff!—an' some o' that there quick-made puddin' ye jest hafter add water to.

"Somehow," continued Mr. Day, "I can't get along very well without *some* dessert. Been useter it so many years, ye know. And them doughnuts Almiry left me seemed jest to melt away like an Aperl snowstorm."

"You better wait a little, Mr. Day," said the storekeeper, smiling. "I heard your wife tell mine that she thought everything would be all right now, and she was fixin' to go home."

"Thanks be!" exclaimed Mr. Day devoutly.

"You been in deep trouble yourself, Mr. Day," said Hopewell.

"Yep. But I see the clouds liftin'," Uncle Jason said, licking his lips and leaning both hands on the counter. "Them bank folks sartainly was right arter me. Houndin' the court to order me sold up—they did so!

"But when that telegram come from my son down there on the Border about Tom Hotchkiss"—Jason Day said "my son," oh, so proudly!—"I showed it to the judge an' he granted stay of perceedin's.

"'Course, we ain't heard nothin' more from Marty and Janice. But I reckon they air busy a-rescuin' of Broxton Day. When *that's* done we'll l'arn all about Tom Hotchkiss.

"Did you say my wife would be ready to go hum soon?"

"Yes. You see," said Hopewell cheerfully, "Grandma Scattergood is going to stay with us now."

Uncle Jason was no more startled by this announcement than he would have been had he looked into the sitting room behind the store just then and

seen the birdlike little old woman sitting close beside the cradle which she was rocking with an industrious foot.

Mrs. Day was putting on her bonnet before the looking-glass and trying the strings in a neat bow-knot between two of her chins. In a cushioned chair, well wrapped from any possible draught, sat 'Rill, the roses gone from her cheeks but with a wonderful light in her eyes.

Mrs. Scattergood was leaning forward to scrutinize the baby in the cradle. His eyes were wide open and he was staring quite as earnestly at Mrs. Scattergood. Suddenly he screwed up his tiny face into what *might* have been a smile.

"For the Good Land o' Goshen!" gasped Mrs. Scattergood.

She turned suddenly and beckoned to little Lottie, who stood beside Mrs. Drugg's chair.

"Lottie, come here," she commanded.

The little girl went to her and stood looking down into the cradle, too. Mrs. Scattergood put an arm about her and drew her down closer, looking first into the baby's face and then into the luminous violet eyes of Lottie.

"For the Good Land o' Goshen!" she repeated. "Do you know, 'Rill, the blessed baby's got eyes jest like Lottie? An' I believe his nose is goin' to be like hers, too.

"Fancy! He favors Hopewell's side of the fam'-

bly a whole lot more than he does ourn. Wal! I allus have said that the Druggses was well-favored."

"There could be nothing more to add to my happiness if my boy should look like his father," her daughter said softly.

"I never hope to live to see the Millennium," remarked Aunt 'Mira as she went back across town with Mr. Day. "I had a great-aunt that was a Millerite and give away all her things an' climbed up on to the house roof expectin' the end of the world an' to be caught up into Glory—only she fell off the roof an' broke her hip an' the world didn't come to an end anyway.

"Howsomever, I consider I've seen what 'most matches the Millennium."

"What's that?" demanded her puzzled spouse.

"Miz' Scattergood a-huggin' little Lottie on the one hand an' cooin' to that baby in the cradle on t'other. Does beat all what fools babies make of us women," and she laughed, though she wiped the tears away.

"Don't you mean angels, 'stead o' fools?" asked Uncle Jason.

It was true that Frank Bowman was very busy about this time. The last spike was driven to affix the rails of the V. C. branch road to Polktown and he was working like a Trojan to make all ready for the regular running of trains to and from the main

line. But there were people in Polktown who never would forgive him for suppressing certain telegrams that reached him from the Southwest about this time.

"There ain't no excuse for a man bein' a hawg," Walky Dexter afterward declared. "Frank might ha' intermated what was comin' off when the fust train was due ter pull into Polktown; I sha'n't never feel jest the same towards him again."

Half the town had turned out to welcome the initial train. The stores were trimmed with bunting and many of the residences displayed flags, as though it were the Fourth of July or Memorial Day.

Mr. Middler was scheduled for a speech. He made it, too; but not quite the speech the good minister had intended. For it was his eyes that first identified one of the passengers on the incoming train. Before the locomotive halted Mr. Middler uttered a very robust shout and rushed to the steps of the first passenger car, his hands outstretched.

"Janice! Janice Day!"

A rising murmur went through the crowd; then they cheered. The girl stood smiling on the platform looking out over the crowd, and when they cheered such a fire of pride and delight flashed up in her countenance and sparkled from her hazel eyes as nobody had ever seen before.

"Oh—*folks!*" she murmured, stretching her hands out to them.

Frank Bowman stood at one side, smiling broadly. "We're not celebrating the opening of the railroad branch," he said to Elder Concannon, "half as much as we are celebrating the home-coming of Janice Day."

Janice went down the steps into Mr. Middler's arms. Directly behind her was a man with his arm in a sling who looked enough like Jason Day—though younger and sprucer—to be identified as Janice's father.

Then came Marty grinning so broadly that, as Walky Dexter declared, it almost engulfed his ears! Lastly came Nelson Haley, walking with his head up and a smile of great confidence on his face.

"Jefers-pelters!" said Walky. "I guess schoolmaster's quite some punkins again in his own estimation. It ain't done *him* no harm to go down there to Mexico."

There was a great deal of public congratulation and welcome for the party from the Border; but it was that evening, in the broad sitting room of the old Day house on Hillside Avenue, when the excitement of the home-coming had worn off, that the family party began to realize the adventurous weeks that had elapsed were finally all behind them.

The wind soughed eerily in the trees about the house—"working up a storm for Christmas," Uncle Jason prophesied. Marty brought in an armful of knotty chunks and fed the great, air-tight stove.

They gathered around the fire, for supper was over and Aunt 'Mira and Janice had come in from the kitchen. Nelson had managed to secure the chair next to Janice. Mr. Jason Day and his half-brother sat side by side.

"Well," said Marty, blowing a huge sigh, "this ain't much like Mexico."

"I sh'd hope not!" exclaimed his mother, seeking her knitting in the basket on the shelf under the table. "That's a reg'lar heathenish land, I expect."

"It sure is!" agreed her son with fervor. "Why, d'you know what they live on, Ma?"

"I guess you didn't git home fodder down there, Marty," said Mrs. Day, chuckling comfortably. "What *do* they live on?"

"Beans," said the boy in a sepulchral tone. "An' say! I've busted your bean-pot. Don't you dast give me pork an' beans for a year come next Christmas."

They laughed. It was easy to laugh now—for all the party. Humor did not have to be of a high order to bring the smiles to their lips, for a deep and abiding happiness dwelt in all their hearts.

Mr. Broxton Day looked around the old and well-remembered sitting room. "It looks about the same as it did when I was a boy, Jase," he said.

"Yep. Almiry's kep' things about as when ma was with us."

"Almira is a wonderful woman," said Broxton Day, smiling across at his sister-in-law.

"You be still, Brocky Day," said Aunt 'Mira, bridling.

"Yes," he told her gravely. "For you've kept the spirit of the old home alive here, too."

"She and Janice," said Marty.

"Dunno what we would do without *Janice,*" Aunt 'Mira said, quick to turn the compliment.

"Ain't it so?" echoed Uncle Jason. "And you comin' hum—right back from the grave as ye might say, Broxton—is more'n a delight to us. It's a blessin'. What you tell me about that—that derned Tom Hotchkiss——"

"Don't cuss, Jason—an' you a perfessin' member," urged his wife.

"How you goin' to speak of sech a reptile like him without cussin', I wanter know?" grumbled Uncle Jason.

"Well, he's got his," said Marty briskly. "He had all that money hid away in banks, and was just goin' to lay low till things blew over and then he'd set up housekeepin' in that red vest of his somewhere else, an' live easy. But that vest o' his has sort o' faded, ain't it?"

"Hopewell Drugg's got in some real pretty knitted ones," murmured Aunt 'Mira, picking up a dropped stitch.

Marty gaped in surprise.

"Real pretty *what?*" demanded her husband sharply.

"Vests. D'ye want one for your Christmas, Jason?"

"Oh, cricky!" ejaculated Marty. "I seen 'em hanging there in his window when I went over this afternoon before supper. Dad, they are fully as gay as Tom Hotchkiss' was."

"I bet you was over there to see Lottie Drugg," said his mother quickly.

"What if I was?" demanded the bold, yet blushing Marty. "I dunno nobody in Polktown I was gladder to see than Lottie, 'nless 'twas you, Ma."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Jason Day. "An' he probberbly won't say that many more times, Almiry. So make the most of it."

"Yes," Janice said softly. "Marty's growing up."

At this the youth grew red in the face and bit his lip. But then he straightened up boldly, as if he were a soldier.

"Huh! speak for yourself, Janice Day. You've *grown* up, you have! You ought to have seen all those greaser army officers dancin' around after her," and he cast a teasing glance at Nelson.

"You can't bother me, young man," replied the schoolmaster, smiling broadly.

"I guess I'm the only one to be bothered at all by our Janice's growing up," her father said a little

seriously. "Just as I have her again I seem next door to losing her."

Janice got up, crossed the room, and kissed him; but her glance was warm for Nelson as she did so.

The muffled tones of the old grandfather's clock in the hall clashed the hour of ten. Uncle Jason reached down The Book from the corner of the mantelpiece and opened it, reading that night the story of the happiness of another family whose brother came back from the grave.

THE END

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